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Compiled and distributed by Michael C Jennings (ABBA Co-ordinator)

for contributors to the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

The Interim Atlas is delayed

It is a great disappointment to report that the *Interim Atlas* has been delayed yet again. In *Phoenix 10* the plan was to get the it out in mid 1994 but many helpful and important improvements from those reviewing the draft needed to be incorporated. Then a series of small software problems and the database crashing made it impossible to produce up to date maps. At the time of going to press, December 1994, it looks as if the final manuscript of the *Interim Atlas* would be prepared in early 1995 with, hopefully, distribution in mid 1995. A mock up sample page for the *Interim Atlas* showing three species accounts and their distribution maps appears at page 2.

I had a very encouraging response from readers to the slip enclosed with *Phoenix 10* for news of the *Interim Atlas*. I will advise them all about availability just as soon as the printing begins and I know how many copies I have to distribute. Meanwhile, if you want a copy and have not yet advised me let me know the address to which I should send news. I have no idea about its price but I hope to have plenty of free copies for those contributing records over the years. The final atlas phase will be to the timescale announced in *Phoenix 10*. Work will not start until the *Interim Atlas* is completed.

During the year since the Issue of *Phoenix 10* there have been two ABBA atlassing surveys. No 15 was to northern Oman with much assistance and generous sponsorship of the Oman Adviser for Conservation of the Environment and No 16 to north west and north central Saudi Arabia under the auspices of the NCWCD. A summary of the Oman survey has been submitted for publication in *Oman Bird News* and a short account of the highlights of Survey 16 appears in this issue. During the year the report to the NCWCD on Surveys 11 and 12, to UAE, Oman and northern Saudi Arabia, was finalised; see details later in this issue.

1994 saw the publication of a milestone document concerning the birds of the Middle East region, in the form of *Important Bird Areas in the Middle East* by Michael Evans, published by BirdLife International. This report will serve as a reference for

Governments, NGOs and individuals interested in or concerned about birds and their conservation in the Middle East for the next decade. Further details about this important publication can be found in this issue.

Readers will find below an article on the number of potentially breeding birds found so far in each atlas square. All contributors are urged to study the map and identify those local squares that are relatively poorly covered - and make a special effort to visit sites within these squares in the next breeding season. You might be forgiven for believing that after 10 years of the ABBA project we know all we need to know about the distribution of breeding birds in Arabia. But you would be wrong! For many species there is still an incomplete picture of distribution and for even for common birds little is known about breeding biology. There is no time to relax, please continue with your fieldwork with renewed vigour and continue to send in your report sheets.

Michael Jennings

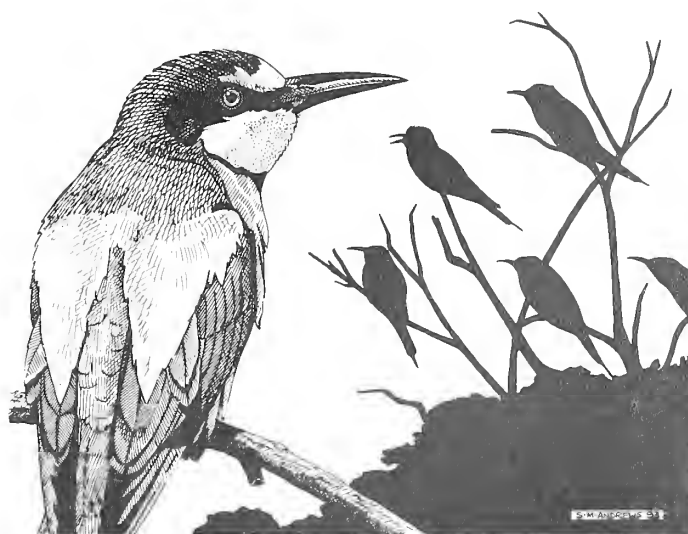
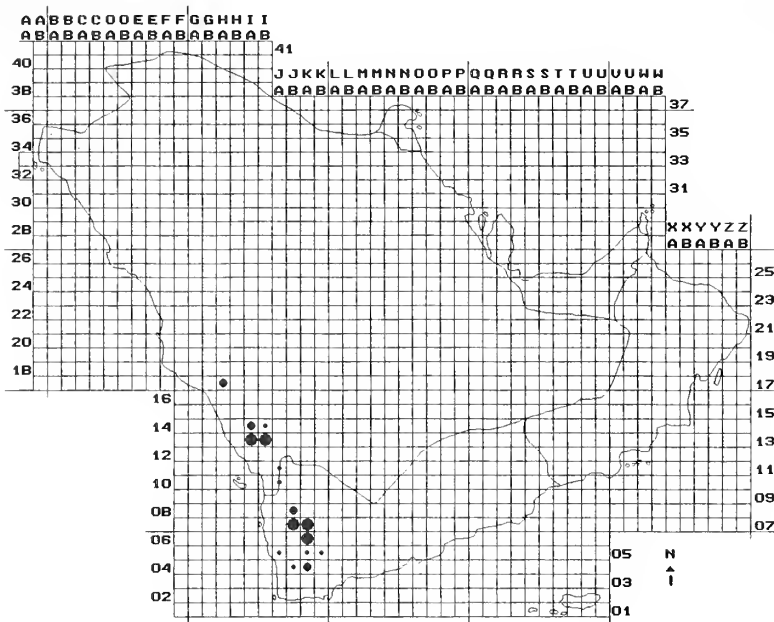


Fig 1. There are several breeding records of the European bee-eater *Merops apiaster* in the northern parts of the UAE and Oman but the species never shows signs of breeding elsewhere in Arabia.

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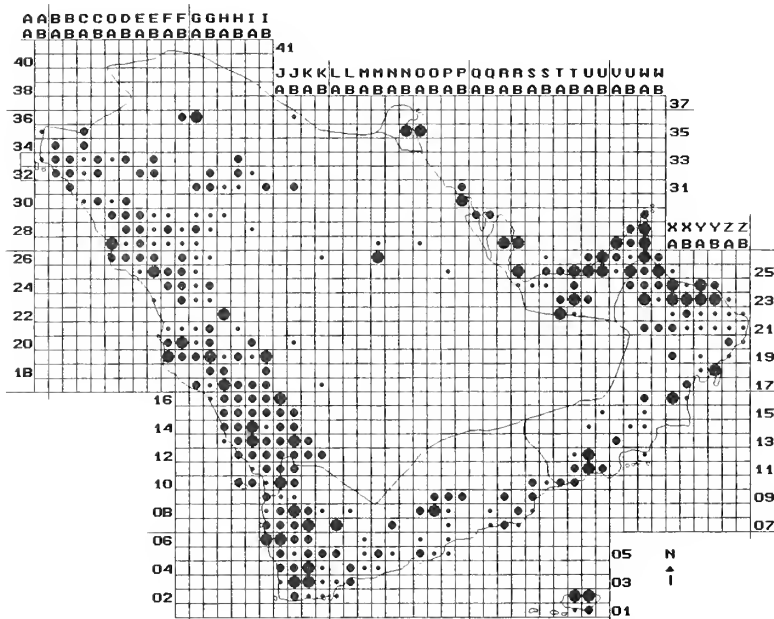
الإشراف والنشر بواسطة
الهيئة الوطنية لحماية الحياة الفطرية
وإنماها.
ص ب ٦١٦٨١، الرياض،
المملكة العربية السعودية



688. DUSKY TURTLE DOVE

Streptopelia lugens

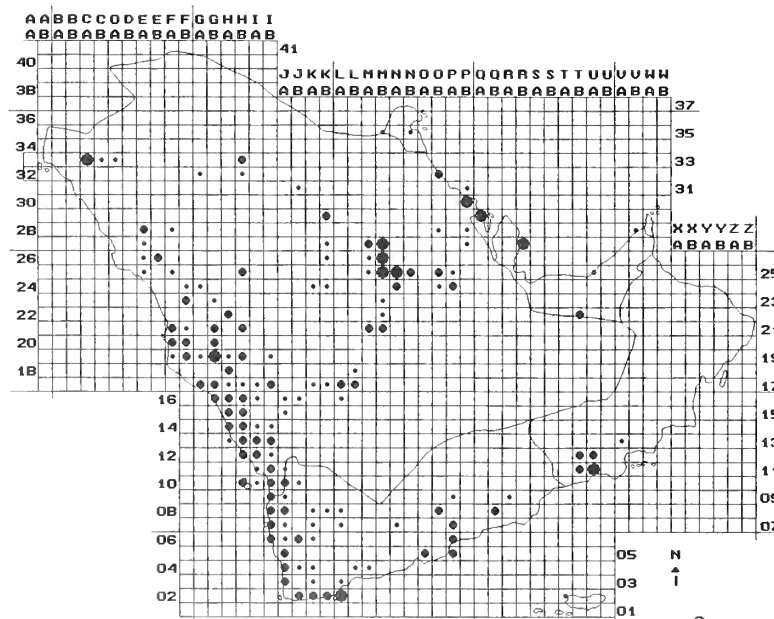
Breeds in the highlands of the south west, occurring where there are plenty of trees and bushes. Probably an altitudinal migrant, there are certainly some at sea level on the Tihama in winter. Eggs reported from May and young in the nest until July. The fragile stick nest is placed in a bush or tree, once in a shrub down a well shaft.



690. PALM DOVE

Streptopelia senegalensis

A widespread resident in western, southern and eastern Arabia. Has colonised Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, the Eastern Province and much of central Arabia since the early 1980's. This rapid spread is probably in response to new habitats provided by irrigated fields and gardens. Eggs or young in the nest recorded all year round. Multi brooded. The fragile twig nest (sometimes hardly broader than the sitting bird) is placed in bushes, often supported in a crotch of the main bough, and occasionally on buildings.



692. NAMAQUA DOVE

Oena capensis

Resident in the south west, especially the Tihama and the dry eastern edges to the highlands. Scarce and local in the highlands. Has expanded its range since 1975 into central, eastern, and northern Arabia including Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, UAE and Qatar and continues to extend its range. Its erratic movements have not been studied and are not understood but it has been observed migrating across the Red Sea and has occurred on Das Island (SB27) in the Arabian Gulf. Adults at nests from March, eggs May, and young in the nest June. The cupped nest of twigs, is lined with stems and grasses and placed in low bushes or on a palm frond.

New breeding species:

A breeding colony of gull-billed terns in Saudi Arabia

In December 1992, while making a census of breeding Socotra cormorants *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* on the islands along the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah Suhaibani found the remains of a large, dense tern colony on Zakhnuniya, a large inshore island in the Gulf of Salwa (QA27). This colony was composed of several sub-colonies of which the largest was located on a narrow sandy beach, separated from the main sandsheet of the island by a long subkha 50-100 m wide. Other sub-colonies were located on small, isolated, sparsely vegetated sand patches on this subkha. This nesting habitat, as well as the high nest density (about ten nests in each square metre) are typical for lesser crested tern *Sterna bengalensis*, which was confirmed by the remains of several chicks in and around the colony. The entire colony contained at least 500 nests.

In one sub-colony of about 40 nests, several intact eggs were found, mostly lying outside the nests and partly buried in the sand. However, these eggs appeared to be slightly different in form and size from the lesser crested tern eggs. A sample of 12 eggs were brought back to the research center in Jubail where they were measured and compared with lesser crested tern eggs from Karan Island. They were slightly more rounded and less pointed than the Karan samples. When compared to measurements and colour plates of other tern eggs in Cramp; 1985; *Birds of the Western Palearctic* Vol 4, they were remarkably similar to those of the gull-billed tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*. However, the high nest density in the colony on Zakhnuniya (several nests in each square metre) differed significantly from the typical colony structure of gull-billed tern as described in Cramp; 1985; where the minimum distances between nests is given as varying from 0.8 to 12 m. Plans were made to visit this colony again during the early summer of 1994 in the hope of confirming the presence of breeding gull-billed terns.

Due to other work commitments it was not possible to revisit the island before 11 June 1994. As we approached the island by boat we observed large numbers of lesser crested terns with chicks of 5-10 days old on the narrow sand beach, and adults sitting on nests in the different sub-colonies. A closer investigation of the entire colony revealed that it contained a total of about 800 breeding pairs of lesser crested terns and that virtually all of them had chicks. We failed to detect any gull-billed terns within this colony.

However, as soon as we set foot on land, some 100 m from the colony, four alarming adult gull-billed terns came hovering above our heads. Two of these landed some 250 m away from the main colony, where they attended a nearly full-grown chick. A further search in the area within 1-2 km of the main colony revealed a total of 26 adult gull-billed terns and 7 chicks. Six of these chicks were already flying or about to, while one chick was estimated to be 15-20 days old. Another pair with a fully fledged chick was observed at a distance of some 3 km from the colony. With an incubation period of 20-22 days and a fledging period of 30-35 days (Cramp 1985), the gull-billed

terns had started breeding during the third week of April, thus at least three weeks ahead of the lesser crested terns.

Despite being well known as a breeding species from the marshes of southern Iraq, the Iranian Gulf coast and Pakistan, these records represent only the first confirmed breeding of gull-billed tern in Arabia. Previous indications of breeding existed from Bahrain where very young fledged birds were recorded in May (*Phoenix* 8:8) and June-August (Nightingale and Hill; 1993, *Birds of Bahrain*) and from Riyadh where a pair once showed early breeding season behaviour (Jennings, in prep, *Interim Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia*). In Jubail a pair was seen displaying and scraping a nest at Sabkhat al-Fasl (PA31) from the end of April to mid-May 1993. This pair disappeared after having preyed on virtually every single chick of at least 40 pairs of kentish plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus* and 10 pairs of avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* that hatched during the period at the site. More recently, on 20 June 1994, Abdullah Suhaibani and Phillipe Gaucher observed a flock of 15 adults and 10 recently fledged juveniles on the northern beach of Tarut. However, at present it is not clear whether these birds dispersed from the colony at Zakhnuniya or whether they originated from another, as yet undiscovered breeding colony in or near Tarut Bay.

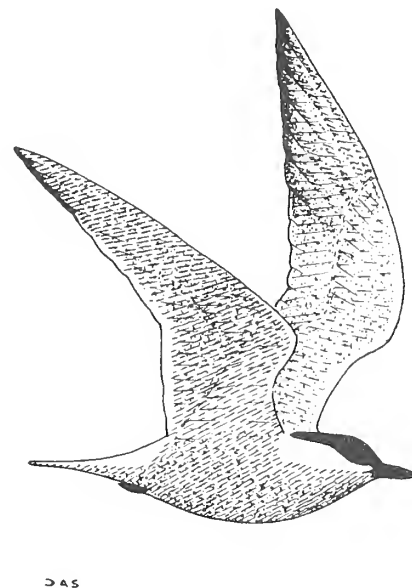


Fig 2. The gull-billed tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* has been suspected of breeding on Arabian Gulf shores in the past; breeding was proved for first time in Arabia in 1994.

Another possible breeding record of gull-billed terns in Saudi Arabia was reported to us by Abdulrahman al Thenayan. In May 1993 he recorded at least 200 pairs of tern-like birds with eggs and small chicks in very loose colonies on several islets in large freshwater pools in the desert south of Hafr al Batin. These temporary pools were formed by the exceptionally large amount of rainfall during the previous winter and spring. The birds were described as being "white with a black cap" and "of the size of a black-headed gull *Larus ridibundus*". He further reported that the birds were mostly hunting with slow wing beats over the surrounding desert where they preyed on beetles which were taken in a diving swoop without landing on the

ground. Although these limited descriptions do not allow a positive identification, we believe that his information on the size of the birds, the location and structure of the breeding colony, as well as the described hunting behaviour and type of prey, all indicate gull-billed tern as being the most likely species.

Abdullah Suhaibani and Peter Symens, NCWCD, c/o Wildlife Sanctuary for the Gulf Region, PO Box 11071, Jubail 31961, Saudi Arabia.

Corn Bunting confirmed breeding in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia

During the winters of 1991/2 and 1992/3 we frequently observed small flocks of corn buntings *Miliaria calandra* at the Al Sharqiyah Agricultural Development Company in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. This site, which is situated at approximately 50 km southwest of Jubail (PA30), consists of a large fenced area (10 km x 10 km) with about 95 pivot fields on which cereals, hay and alfalfa is cultivated. Prior to 1994 we did not visit this site any later than March. On a visit on 10 March 1993, there were at least 30 corn buntings observed during a visit that covered some 20% of the total cultivated area. Alerted by possible breeding records in the UAE in 1993 (Richardson, 1993; *Phoenix* 10:3), we decided to visit this site on a regular basis during the spring and summer of 1994 and the following observations were obtained:

--- January-February: At least 100 corn buntings were counted in approximately 30% of the cultivated area. Most records were of flocks of 3 to 30 birds but on 21 February, eight singing males were detected in growing wheat fields.

--- 25 March: By this time the cereal fields were already being harvested. At least 28 singing males were located on four ripened wheat fields and eight hay fields.

--- 14 April: All cereal fields had been harvested and two of the hay fields had been cut. However 19 singing males were located on the remaining six mature hay fields. At least seven individual corn buntings and a flock of five were observed on the harvested fields.

--- 24 May: There were still eight singing males on three mature hay fields. Furthermore several single birds and pairs were flushed, as was a group of three birds consisting of a pair with a very recently fledged juvenile that could hardly fly.

--- 16 June: No singing was heard. We observed a small flock of nine birds including at least three juveniles, which we recognised at a very short distance by the very fresh flight feathers and pale edges on the fresh feathers of the upperparts, in contrast to the very worn flight feathers and narrower, greyer edges in the adults.

--- 8 October: No corn buntings were observed during a short visit to the fields.

Although we obtained only limited conclusive proof of

successful breeding these records indicate that the corn bunting is an established breeding bird at this site. The presence of numerous singing males throughout March, April and May, as well as the many records of paired birds and the frequently observed territorial disputes, suggest that the total potential breeding population consists of several dozen pairs. However, it seems very likely that many nests are destroyed during the early harvesting of the cereals and the regular cutting of the hay fields. Because of this total breeding success may remain very low and individual pairs could well make several, unsuccessful, breeding attempts in a season.

Peter Symens & Abdullah Suhaibani, NCWCD, c/o Wildlife Sanctuary for the Gulf Region, P.O. Box 11071, Jubail 31961, Saudi Arabia.

N.B. Song and copulation by corn buntings was recorded in February and March 1993 at Hamraniyah (VB28) Ras al Khaimah (C Richardson) and nest building near al Ain (VB25) UAE in May 1994 (S Aspinall). Ed.

New exotic breeding birds

The following species, which have been introduced to Arabia either through the pet trade or as ornamental species in gardens and parks, have now bred in a feral state on at least one occasion. It is important the ABBA project should keep track of feral breeding species, however unlikely they may seem in the Arabian environment. Some may multiply and spread to become a widespread and permanent part of the Arabian Avifauna and it will be important to know of their origins. Others may be potential economic pests. Either way it is important that observers report further breeding or attempted breeding activities. The ABBA species code for reporting purposes is shown against each.

2036 Grey crowned crane *Balearica regulorum*

There was a free flying feral population breeding successfully on Sir Bani Yas island (SB25) UAE in April 1994, (D Robinson). The protected conditions that prevail on the Sir Bani Yas are unusual and although this species is quite capable of getting to the mainland it is unlikely to remain unmolested there to breed successfully.

2035 Common peafowl *Pavo cristatus*

Juveniles Jebel Ali hotel grounds (VA26) July 1994, also thought to breed Abu al Abyad island, TB25 (S J Aspinall) and over 100 present, possibly breeding, Sir Bani Yas island (SB25), April 1994, (D Robinson). Unlikely to breed in other than a protected environment.

364 See-see partridge *Annumperdix griseogularis*

Introduced population breeding feral on Sir Bani Yas island (SB25) April 1994, (D Robinson). This species is widespread in Iran and if it reached the mainland would probably find a suitable niche and multiply. It might then present a threat to its very close relative, the sand partridge *Annumperdix heyi*.

2037 Barbary dove *Streptopelia risoria*

This dove is a form of the African collared dove *Streptopelia*

roseogrisea which has been domesticated over a very long time. It was breeding ferally on Sir Bani Yas island (SB25) in April 1994 where it is said to hybridise with the Eurasian collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, (D Robinson).

1577 Brahminy mynah *Sturnus pagodarum*

Adults entering/leaving a nest site in circumstances indicating occupied nests, Dubai (VA27), summer 1994 (M Resa Khan).

***Important Bird Areas of the Middle East* by M I Evans (1994)**

This book is the second important bird area directory of BirdLife International and is probably the single most important ornithological/conservation document yet published for the Middle East area. Its coverage includes the whole of the Arabian peninsula and island dependencies, including Socotra; total range is from the eastern Mediterranean to Afghanistan. It excludes Turkey, Egypt and Cyprus and Pakistan. Such a work is particularly welcome at this time because many Middle East states are poorly endowed with properly protected areas and effective conservation legislation.

The Middle East has diverse eco-systems and supports some 800 species of birds with 60 endemics. Areas which are important for birds are also usually important for all forms of wildlife and to identify such sites - and put in hand action to protect and conserve them - renders a service to all fauna and flora. This directory is prepared primarily as an aid to decision makers, by providing up to date information on important bird habitats and priority areas for the conservation and birds. The inventory of important sites is intended to assist with national strategies for conservation, by listing vital sites and reserves and helping co-ordinate protection through international and national conservation bodies. There are also recommendations for future priorities for bird conservation and research in the Middle East and for the education and training of experts. Although not identified as an objective, the book is also a very valuable reference source for the individual wanting to find and see birds in the Middle East region.

Important sites are identified against six criteria;

- (1) Sites supporting globally threatened species;
- (2) Species concentration sites either for breeding or migration;
- (3) Sites important for declining or threatened species;
- (4) Site important for species with small total ranges;
- (5) Rare, threatened or unique habitats with special characteristics (either of bird communities or of the environment) or with outstanding representative communities;
- (6) Sites important for environmental awareness or for research or sustainable eco-tourism.

One chapter deals with international measures for site conservation and lists the relevant conventions concerning bird and environmental conservation signed up to by each country.

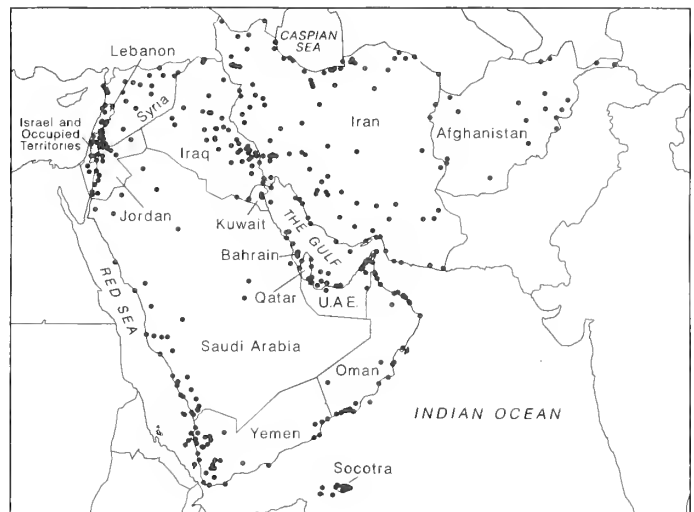


Fig 3. The 391 sites covered by *Important Birds Areas in the Middle East*. (Reproduced from *IBAME*).

The main part of the book provides information presented through an inventory for each state in the Middle East. For each country there is a short introduction on bird conservation there, a location map for the sites detailed and a table of the criteria used to select each site. For each site there is a description, information on its status e.g. protected, unprotected reserve, refuge, national park etc and details of birds occurring at the site. The latter highlighting regionally threatened or declining species, species restricted wholly or largely to the Middle East and globally threatened species. There are also notes on other threatened or endemic wildlife found within the site and important conservation issues which concern it. The introductory chapters provide an overview comprising mainly statistics of the 391 sites dealt with by the book, information on type of sites within each country, the main habitats the sites are comprised of and the degree of protection they enjoy. Altogether the IBA mentions 159 sites in Arabia, ranging from four in Bahrain to 57 in Yemen, including 18 on Socotra island. Appendices deal with the English names of birds and mammals mentioned in the text, the occurrence of globally threatened bird species at IBAs in the Middle East and examples of the data sheets etc used in the sites survey. Recommended. *The IBA for the Middle East is available from BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, CB3 0NA. Price £22.50 ISBN 0-946888-28-0. 410 pages laminated card cover.*

Recent Reports:

The following are a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records of Arabian breeding birds received within the last 12 months; some relate to earlier years. Reports of unusual breeding birds often get reported by more than one observer. Care is taken to credit records as appropriately as possible, so apologies if the original finder of

any particular bird is not properly identified.

Little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Two juveniles being fed by adults Jahra Pool Kuwait September 1993 (C W T Pilcher); first breeding record for Kuwait.

Socotra cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigricollis*

Colony site with scattered dead young found, indicating breeding in winter 1993/4, at Dayina (SA26) and Umm al Qassar islands (SB25), UAE, June 1994 (S J Aspinall).

Pink-backed pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*

Half grown chicks in nests, Farasan islands (IA10), Red Sea, February 1994 (S. Newton).

Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*

Fifty seven nests under construction early April 1994 at Sabkhat al Fasl (PB30), Eastern Province. Breeding did not take place (P Symens).

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Nesting on the ground, Farasan islands (HB10 & IA09) July 1993 (D Morgan). Also young in the nest Red Sea coast, south of Jeddah (FA19), (G R Lobley).

Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

Using old nest of Osprey, Farasan islands (HB10) Red Sea, April 1994 (P R Fisher).

Verreaux's eagle *Aquila verreauxii*

One over cliffs at Tarim (PA09) eastern Yemen, October 1993 (N Redman). A new area for the species.

Lanner falcon *Falco biarmicus*

Pair eastern Yemen (OB08) October 1993 (N Redman). A rarely recorded species in a new area.

Peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Nestlings reported taken from coastal cliffs in northern Oman, September 1993 (Oman Central Record).

Crab plover *Dromas ardeola*

Nest burrows Farasan islands (IA10) June 1993 (D Morgan). Confirmed breeding at new site and new square (TA25) UAE, June 1993 (S J Aspinall).

Sooty gull *Larus henrici*

About 215 pairs, with eggs and young, Qarnayn island (SB26) UAE, May 1993 (S J Aspinall).

Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*

Adults and 2-3 day old chicks Masirah (YB18) Oman, January 1993, (Oman Central Record).

Bruce's scops owl *Otus brucei*

Young just out of the nest, Ras al Khaimah (VB28) July 1993 (E Hirschfeld and S J Aspinall).

Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*

One present Bahrain rimrock 15 August to November 1994 and evidence of occupation of the site for probably at least a year (H. King; *Bahrain Nat Hist Soc Newsletter*, Dec 1994). First

"mainland" record for Bahrain, the only previous record was on an offshore island.

European roller *Coracias garrulus*

Further summer records, northern UAE, (WA28), June 1993 (E Hirschfeld).

Bar-tailed desert lark *Annumanetes cincturus*

Records UB26 and VA26, UAE, June-August 1993 (C Richardson & S J Aspinall).

Reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Singing and juveniles, al Ain (UB25), UAE, March-July 1993 (C Richardson).

Penduline tit *Remiz pendulinus*

Singing and pair chasing in mixed tamarix/reedbed habitat, Sabkhat al Fasl (PB30), Eastern Province, April 1994 (P Symens).

European starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Food carrying April and juveniles May 1993, Hamraniyah (VB28), Ras al Khaimah (C Richardson).

Spanish sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

Feeding young at nest, April 1993, Hamraniyah (VB28), Ras al Khaimah (C Richardson).

Scaly-breasted munia *Lonchura punctulata*

Pair nest building November 1992, Abu Dhabi (S James).

Rüppell's weaver *Ploceus galbula*

Adults food carrying to nest at Thumrait, interior southern Oman (UA12), April 1993 (Oman Central Record).

Yemen serin *Serinus menachensis*

Nest found in May 1994 in the roof of a primitive prayer room on the very summit of Arabia's highest mountain, Jebel Nabi Shuayb (3,666 m), JB16 Yemen. (G Watkins).

Progress so far: Potential breeding birds in each atlas square

Progress so far in previous issues of *Phoenix* has been measured against an aspect of the brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis*, that bird being one of the few species that breed throughout Arabia and its islands. In this issue progress is measured in terms of the number of potential breeding birds (PBBs) recorded so far, for each atlas square. The information is shown on the map at Fig. 4 which displays by symbols the number of PBBs recorded in each square - or the lack of records for that square. The map gives a very rough indication of coverage. Squares with no records are most likely to have not been visited by any observers. Squares with very few PBBs next to squares with a much higher score are also likely to be very poorly covered.

One would expect the Empty Quarter to be particularly poorly covered, including its borderlands in Yemen, Oman and the UAE. However it is a great surprise that there are some 46

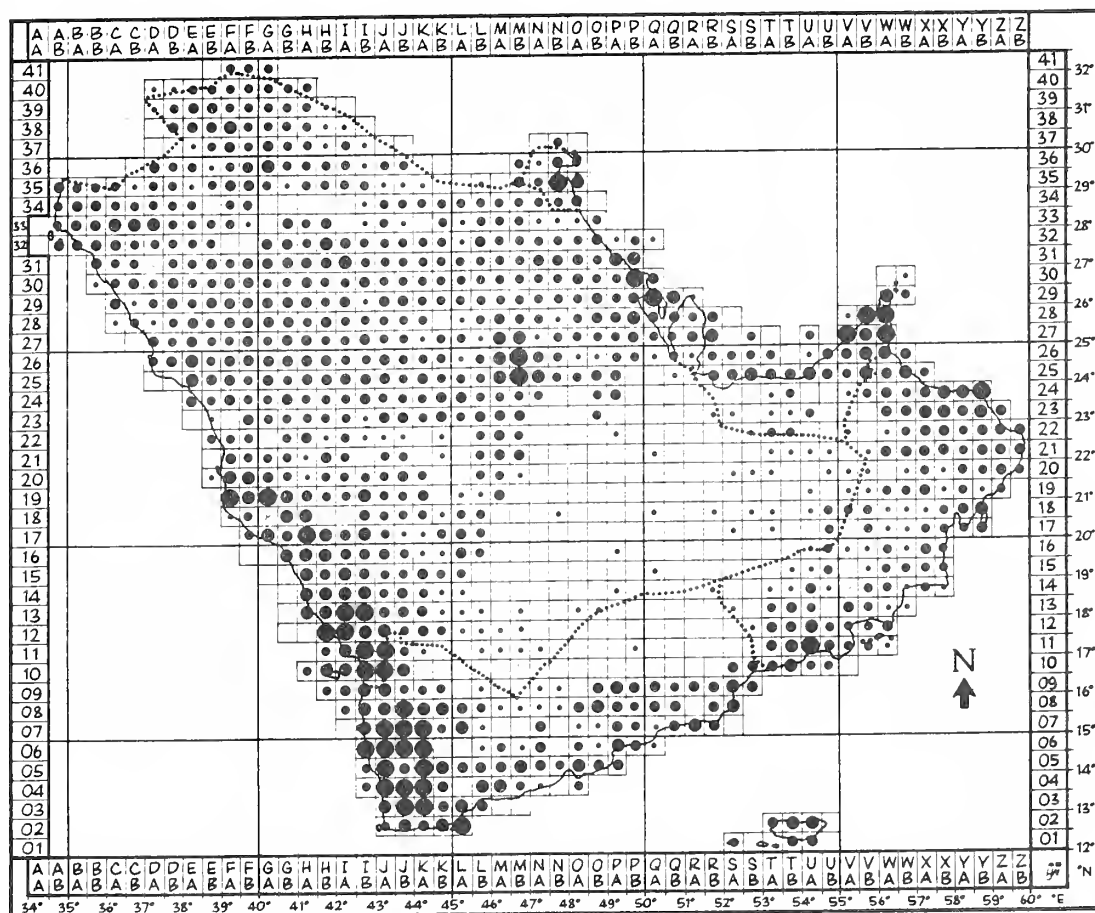


Fig 4. For each ABBA square the number of potential breeding birds recorded on the database is shown as an indication of the overall coverage achieved by the project to date.

Key:

- Square empty = no records
- Smallest dot = 1-4 species
- Second smallest dot = 5-14 species
- Middle sized dot = 15-29 species
- Second largest dot = 30-59 species
- Largest dot = 60 or more species

species recorded in Abu Dhabi town square (UA25) but in the square immediately to the south of the city (UA24) there is not a single record! Surely this can be rectified? There are a number of isolated squares in western Saudi Arabia that all the ABBA surveys have missed - who can fill these?

The three squares with the most PBBs are all in the southwest as might be expected, with Taiz (KA04) Yemen top with 102 species, Raydah escarpment (IA13) near Abha, Saudi Arabia with 100 species and Sanaa (JB07) Yemen with 93 species. Other high scores were Salalah southern Oman and Dubai UAE, with 91 and 90 species respectively.

The number of PBBs in each square needs to be viewed in proper context. The map is a result of a very raw and not very exacting sort of the database. It includes all records of all PBBs, whether there was confirmed breeding or only presence noted. For example at the moment all breeding season records of kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and great grey shrike *Lanius excubitor* are shown. These species do breed over a wide area of Arabia but they do not breed everywhere they have been recorded. Many of the records are of mere presence or visitors. However for the purposes of this exercise they appear as a PBB against all the squares where they have been recorded in the breeding season.. The numbers of PBBs for the coastal squares includes all seabirds breeding around Arabia. In the final stages of the atlas project it is planned to review all these records so that mere presence records are removed from the database if they are likely to obscure the true breeding distribution. However as a rough guide to relative coverage the map holds good.

Prints of all the species occurring in a square with the highest breeding evidence code obtained so far are available for every atlas square on request. Write for a listing of any square you are thinking of visiting.

The possible origin of malachite kingfishers *Alcedo cristata* in Yemen

The recently claimed first breeding of the Malachite kingfisher *Alcedo cristata* in the Arabian peninsula, in southern Yemen in 1993 (Kirwan, 1993; *Phoenix* 10:2) is of interest in relation to other records of the species in the region, including parts of eastern Africa. In fact there is only one previous certain record (Bates, 1938; *Ibis* 14(2):437-462) and another unsubstantiated one mentioned by Kirwan (1993) from Arabia, both in southern Yemen, suggesting that any breeding population must be very small.

The distribution of this species in Africa to the west and south of Yemen indicates that in Somalia the species is confined to the area south of 3°N, where it is locally very common. An exception is a record of a single isolated bird at Iskushuban (10°16'N, 50°14'E) on 30 April 1980, 1000 km to the northeast of its known range (Ash & Miskell, 1983; *Birds of Somalia*). In Ethiopia its distribution is confined to the Rift Valley and the area to the west of it, except for an isolated record down the Webi Shebelli at 5°N, 44°E. There is a concentration of records round the mouth of the Awash River on the Djibouti

border, further north the species is found nearer to the Red Sea in Eritrea, and there is a coastal record at 14°30'N, 40°30'E. In Djibouti Laurent, 1990 (*Catalogue commenté des oiseaux de Djibouti*) records a single occurrence in January.

Numbers vary greatly with season in various sites in Ethiopia. For example relatively large numbers occurred at Gambela (8°15'N, 34°38'E) on the Baro River, near the Sudan border, in August, with 32 ringed on 16 days in one year, and 70 in 15 days in another. At Aseita (11°33'N, 41°26'E) on the Awash River in the Danakil desert in February, March, September, November and December, there were respectively 1.5, 2.1, 2.6, 0.5 and 0.7 birds/day over 2-3 week periods monthly.

Such fluctuations in numbers suggest movement is taking place, and this may occur mainly in August-September. It is perhaps during this period that some birds move far greater distances and account for the scattered records which occur beyond their normal known range. A less likely alternative possibility is that there are scattered small discrete populations which are easy to overlook. Proof of breeding in Yemen would support this latter view, but the present evidence does not in my view really support the suggestion of breeding.

J.S. Ash, Godshill Wood, Fordingbridge, Hants, SP6 2LR, UK.

New Books:

The aim of this section is to give details of new publications which are, in some way, relevant to the study of birds and wildlife in Arabia, or to the Arabian/Middle Eastern environment generally. Most titles mentioned are available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America. Others are on restricted distribution or privately published and readers wishing to obtain copies should contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned.

Alternatively, all the titles reviewed in this issue and earlier *Phoenix* issues may be ordered through Subbuteo books - see advertisement below. When ordering through a library or agent quote the ISBN or ISSN number if given. The prices shown here are published prices, which sometimes include post and packaging. Recommendations made about books are based on the standard of treatment of the subject, format and quality of preparation. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of other new relevant titles not mentioned in this survey.

Falconry and Birds of Prey in the Gulf by D Remple and C Gross, 1993

After a short history of falconry, its ancient origins and practise in the eastern and the western worlds there follows a description of present day falconry in the Arabian Gulf region. This includes details of quarry species (houbara, stone curlew and hare) the falcons used by arabs and the methods they employ to capture and train them. Although one of the oldest pastimes of man, falconry is not an activity that has escaped modern day improvements. The book emphasises how so many things have

changed in recent years, especially with improved understanding of the health and hygiene problems of falcons, veterinary practices, radio tagging of birds to find them more easily and the comfort of the vehicle borne hunt. One chapter deals with the anatomy, especially peculiarities of eyesight, hearing, respiratory systems of raptors, as well as their special methods of flight, feeding and breeding. There is also a long account of the birds of prey occurring in the Gulf, including general essays on migration the classification of birds of prey, with a species account for each raptor known from the Gulf area. For each species there is information about identification, description and distribution. Owls are included in the umbrella grouping of birds of prey. Of particular interest to falconers is a section on diseases such as bird pox and bumble foot and other falconry problems, such as the ingestion of lead shot by birds carelessly fed prey items that have been shot. The volume is complete with a glossary of birds of prey mentioned in the text in english, french, german and their scientific names, plus an index of species and subjects. The book is illustrated throughout by good quality coloured photographs of birds of prey and captive eagles and falcons and some fascinating black and white early photographs of falconry in the 1950's and 60's.

Laminated card covers 103 pages, 200 x 273 mm; price not known. Published by Motivate Publishing, PO Box 2331, Dnbai, UAE. ISBN 1-873544-39-1.

The Desert Ibex by K Habibi, 1994

This book presents the results of several years study of the Nubian ibex *Capra ibex* species by the author. It covers the species history, distribution, ecology and behaviour in Saudi Arabia. The Nubian Ibex is a remarkable animal; it has complicated social structures and is able to utilise plants other herbivores find toxic. Its ability to out-distance man in rugged terrain is the key to its survival in a world where all the plains ungulates have succumbed to hunting. This ibex is now regarded as a key species in the conservation strategy of Saudi Arabia and its future prosperity will provide a yardstick on the health of the environment, and conservation protection measures that have been taken. The author takes us through the evolution of the species, historical research, geographical distribution, feeding ecology, group dynamics, reproduction, aggression and a lot more. There are also recommendations for conservation and management. This study is supported by 40 or more graphs and tables and 20 colour plates.

Hard back, 192 pages (240 x 165 mm). Price not known. Published by the NCWCD Riyadh and Immel Publishing, 20 Berkeley Street, London, W1X 5AE, UK. ISBN 1-898-162859.

Indian Ocean Tropical Fish Guide by H Debelius, 1993

Containing over 900 colour photographs of marine fishes taken in their natural habitat in the western part of the Indian Ocean, this book is a comprehensive overview of fish occurring throughout the region. The geographical area of the book includes all the seas around Arabia but its coverage of the

Arabian Gulf is biased towards the southern end. After a short introduction the book gets straight down to business with the species accounts. There are short introductory notes on classes and some of the important families but there is no consistent treatment of taxa above the species level. The species accounts provide information on size, distribution, depth at which they occur, behaviour, food, colour and reproduction where known. The photographs are for the most part very clear, some are exceptional. They are mostly taken by the author. This book is unusual from the point of view that all the photographs are taken in natural habitats of live fish - so much more attractive than photographs of recently dead or dying fish removed from their element. Photographic subjects include the recently discovered megamouth shark, the prehistoric coelacanth, courting moray eels and amazingly camouflaged scorpion fish. Some species are depicted for the first time in any identification book of this nature. There are indices in English and scientific names. If you are interested in the fish of the seas surrounding Arabia then you will want to have this book. Recommended. An expanded CD ROM version is also available.

Hardback, 320 pages (230 x 150 mm). Price DM 69.50. Published by Aquaprint, Verlags GMBH, Landstrasse 3B, D-63329, Egelsbach, Germany. ISBN 3-927991-01-5.

Coral Reefs of the World, Volume 2: Indian Ocean, Red Sea and Gulf by C Sheppard and S M Wells, 1991

This directory to the coral reefs of the Indian Ocean, which includes all the seas around Arabia, is a compilation of international importance. It is a contribution to the UNEP sponsored regional action plans for the protection and development of the marine environment and coastal areas. A 50 page introduction sets the scene with background information on reef distribution, the economic importance of reefs, their vulnerability including human impact, and the management of reef ecosystems. The main chapter comprises a country by country account of the coral reef resources each possess. There is a general description of the reefs disturbances and problems, the legislation background and management facilities in each country. There is also a location map for each country and a list of references. The most important sites are chronicled individually with information provided on geographical location, the area and depth of the coral structures, coral species to be found and other noteworthy flora and fauna, both above and below the water level. All countries of the Arabian peninsula are covered in this publication although the former "South Yemen" only gets a brief mention. This is an important reference to the marine resources of the Arabian region and is recommended.

Laminated hardback cover, 439 pages (295 x 210 mm). Price £25 (45 US dollars) post and packing extra. Published by IUCN Publications Services Unit, 219C Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL, UK. ISBN 2-88032-94-2.

Acacia and Other Genera of the Mimosoideae in Saudi Arabia by S A Chaudhary, 1983

A very useful identification guide to the mimosoideae found in Saudi Arabia, as native, naturalised or prominent introductions. The sub family is represented in Saudi Arabia by six genera i.e. *Acacia* (14 or 15 native species), *Albizia* (1 species), *Dichrostachys* (1 species), *Leucaena* (1 species), *Pithecellobium* (1 species) and *Prosopis* (4 species). Keys are provided to genera and species. There are also line drawings of the seeds, flowers and leaves of each taxa described.

Card cover, 87 pages (162 x 230 mm). This guide is only available to organisations and individuals who are seriously interested in the botany of Saudi Arabia, on application to Mr Mohammad Bin Salamah, Director National Herbarium of Saudi Arabia, NAWRC, PO Box 17285, Riyadh, 11484, Saudi Arabia.

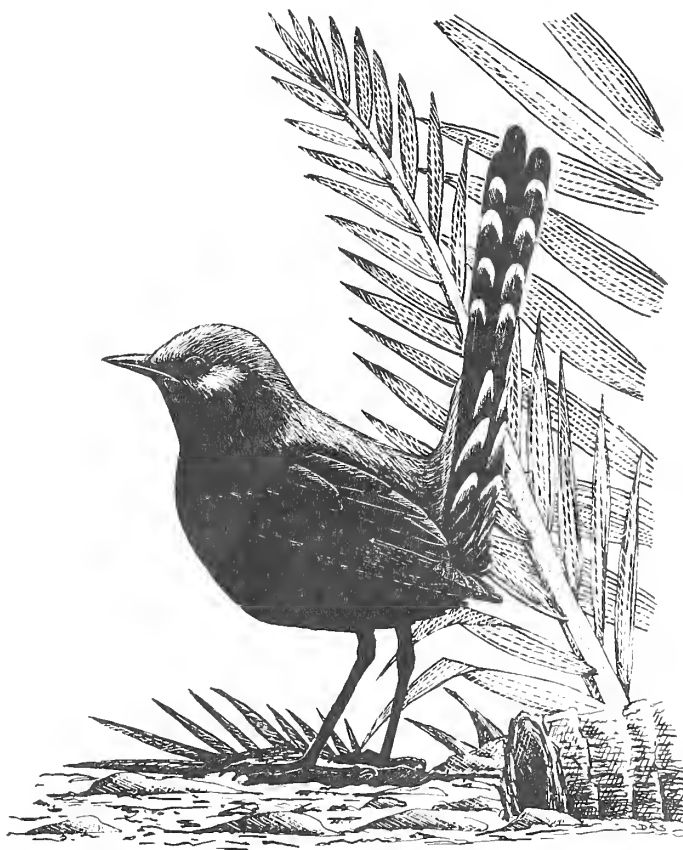


Fig 5. The first sighting of a black bush chat *Cercotrichas podobe* in Bahrain occurred in April 1994 (*Bahrain Nat. Hist. Soc. Newsletter* 1994 No. 5). This species is gradually spreading to all corners of Arabia.

The Hawkmoths of the Western Palearctic by A R Pittaway, 1993

The first impression you get of this book is a well illustrated, authoritative reference and you are not disappointed. The author has widely explored Arabia and the Middle East in

search of butterflies and moths and is co-author of the *Insects of Eastern Arabia* reviewed in *Phoenix* 5.14. This title covers the 57 species of hawkmoths that occur in the Western Palearctic, that is from the Sahara to the Arctic and from the Atlantic to Siberia, including some migrants and vagrants to the area. A good number of them breed in Arabia and several more occur as visitors. It is an extremely interesting reference source to this colourful group of large moths and handsome caterpillars. It starts off with a history of the study of the *sphinxidae* and then goes into their life history, including egg, larvae, pupae and adult, adult biology, morphology and classification. It covers the ecology of these animals in considerable detail dealing with their distribution, the plants they feed on and parasites which attack them and includes detailed breeding requirements. The species accounts are preceded by a checklist of Western Palearctic hawkmoths and the characteristics of each family, sub-family, tribe, sub-tribe and genus. At the species level there is a full description of the adult and the various life stages of all 57 species and 28 sub-species occurring in the region. Information is given of host plants and parasites in each case, breeding information and the vernacular names in several European languages. Each species account is complete with a distribution map which shows breeding range and the limits of its migratory range where appropriate. The book is illustrated with 60 text figures, including some black and white photographs, 58 maps and 19 superb colour plates, which illustrate 12 habitats (photos), 55 caterpillars (18 by photos, 44 by paintings) and 129 adults by photos. The book is complete with several appendices covering how to rear hawkmoths, a gazetteer and glossary. There is an extensive reference list, systematic index, index of plants and subject index. This is an extremely attractive book which will be of interest to anyone who has ever admired a hawkmoth. It is a must for all professional and vocational lepidopterists in the Western Palearctic, including Arabia. Highly recommended.

Hardback, 240 pages (290 x 215 mm). Price £55. Published by Harley Books, Martins, Great Hawksley, Colchester, Essex, CO6 4AH UK, in association with the Natural History Museum, London. ISBN 0946589-21-6.

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An Annotated Catalogue of the Vascular Plants of Oman and their Vernacular Names by Shahina A Ghazanfar, 1992

This catalogue is the first title to cover all the plants of Oman; it provides brief details of almost 1,200 species (200 of which are of grasses) and some information on cultivated species. Introductory chapters deal with the history of plant collecting in Oman, climate and the classification of vegetation zones in the country. Most species are to be found in the northern and southern highlands. In the southern highlands of Dhofar 5% of all plants are endemic. On the plains, which make up at least 80% of the country, only 25% of the plants can be found. More than half of all Oman plants are annuals. The species are arranged to the Cronquist system of classification. For each plant there is a brief note of its diagnostic characters and habitat as well as localities of places of collection. Keys are provided, usually where there are five or more species occurring within a genus in Oman. Where there are local names in Arabic, Dhofari, Jibali (the language of the Dhofar mountains) or Harsusi (the Wahiba sands dialect) these are given by transliteration into English. Some common synonyms are also given. This is an important introduction to the plants of Oman and until the forthcoming *Flora of Oman* or the multi-volume *Flora of Arabia*, are with us, it will be a very valuable source for anyone interested in the plants of Oman and all eastern parts of Arabia. The book is complete with a useful list of references, and indices to genera and vernacular names.

Laminated card covers, 153 pages (200 x 290 mm). Price not known. Published as Scripta Botanica Belgica, Volume 2 by the National Botanical Garden of Belgium, Domein Van Bouchout, B-1860, Meise, Belgium. ISBN 90-72619-08-0.

New Arabic Books:

Birds of Bahrain and the Arabian Gulf by S A Mohamed, 1993

This title is a welcome addition to the slowly growing list of bird books available on Middle East birds in Arabic. As the title suggests it covers the birds of the Arabian Gulf but with a bias to Bahrain the home of the author. The first chapter is a short introductory one which includes a few habitat photographs. Following this the species accounts are divided into two sections, the first dealing with 100 of the more common birds in some detail and is illustrated by photographs. The second section covers less common species, is more cursory, and is illustrated by paintings. The species accounts in the first group provide the Arabic (including local Arabian Gulf names), English and scientific names for each species, status and months of occurrence. There are also some notes on the characteristics of each species, breeding, feeding and world distribution. There are about 130 or so photographs in all, the quality of them ranges from very good to rather grainy and poor. The second section of the book has very short accounts of another 160 or so species, each illustrated by a painting, and covers the rarer species which occur on the island. In addition

left. To enable easy cross-referencing to other maps, the map overleaf also shows the latitude (°N) on the right and longitude (°E) along the bottom. Note that it is the co-ordinates of the south-west corner of the square that identify the Square Reference. For example square LB27 is bordered on the south by 25°N and to the west by 45½°E; UA25 is 24°N and 54°E; and 16½°N, 41½°E is HB10.

The report form for observers' records is Form 3 and a supply is enclosed with these instructions. Current contributors are asked to complete and return copies of Form 3 after each breeding season. The breeding season will of course vary according to region and habitat but generally for Palearctic landbirds it is February to May, and during this time the most useful work can be done. In some areas and for some species, breeding can occur all the year round. If observers are likely to remain in an area for any length of time it is recommended that they complete copies of Form 3 in pencil as information will almost certainly be updated as the season progresses. Only the highest BEC for each species square is needed actually on the Form 3 but details of nesting progress, or of other confirmed breeding occurrences of the same species in the same square, would be valued in the form of additional notes on the back of the form. (The sample completed Form 3 enclosed gives some idea of the type of extra notes that would be welcomed). Contributors may find it useful to keep photocopies of report forms submitted so as to avoid too much duplication in subsequent years but also to highlight which squares or species need to receive attention in later seasons. Further notes on the completion of the report form may be found on the reverse of Form 3. Additional comments about completing the report forms also appear in *The Phoenix* newsletter from time to time.

If you are unable to reproduce copies locally extra forms are available on request. Please copy these papers to others who may be interested in the scheme.

Access, co-operation and credits

A project like the Arabia Atlas involves a great many contributors reporting over a long period. In such circumstances it is only proper that as many people as possible, especially contributors, should benefit from the information collected. The project co-operates with all institutions and individuals interested in the birds of the area. For example, contributors who are intending to publish their own observations can be provided with up to date details of the distribution of individual species or the birds occurring in finite areas. (The project has already made significant contributions to many scientific papers and ongoing conservation projects.) A close working relationship is sought with all natural history groups active in Arabia and with their ornithological recorders, so that benefits may accrue to all parties. All information passed on will, wherever possible, be properly credited to the original observer.

The keynote of the project is therefore one of co-operation, with contributors, if they wish, being able to get as much information out of the scheme as they put in. Periodic summaries are published of records collected and *Phoenix* will keep those taking part in contact and provide information and news. Contributors may, if they wish, place any reasonable publicity embargo on their records, for example to protect the site of a rare nesting species or when they wish to publish their own work exclusively. However, undue secrecy is to be avoided if possible as often the publication of a species breeding outside its normal range inspires others to seek further breeding evidence in nearby squares.

Michael C Jennings
Co-ordinator

1 Warners Farm
Warners Drove
Somersham
Cambridgeshire
PE17 3HW
England



ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA

Introduction

The ABBA project aims to provide a comprehensive account of the distribution and status of bird species breeding within the Arabian Peninsula.

In common with most of the several other ornithological atlas schemes which are in progress in the Middle East and Africa, the Arabian atlas has the half degree square as its unit of survey. This format has been found to be the most practical basis for large, under-recorded areas because no special maps are needed, contributors being able to work from local road maps. The Arabian Peninsula extends to 21 degrees of latitude and 26 degrees of longitude. There are over 1,100 half degree squares in the atlas area, of a relatively uniform size; from about 55 x 56km at Aden to about 48 x 55km at Kuwait. The atlas squares are shown on pages 2 and 3.

ABBA fieldwork commenced in 1984. A concurrent programme was started in that year to review all the relevant literature and examine museum specimens to extract relevant data from those sources. Efforts are also being made to find all previous observers with unpublished records. NB Records prior to 1984 are especially valuable.

Advice to contributors

A valuable contribution to the atlas can be made by every ornithologist or birdwatcher resident in or visiting Arabia, and by all those who have records of previous observations in the Peninsula.

The atlas database is being built up from three main record elements: these are the species, the Breeding Evidence Code (BEC) and the Square Reference. There are over 200 breeding species and these are listed on Form 2, enclosed with these instructions. The Breeding Evidence Code is based on the 17 point system developed by the European Ornithological Atlas Committee and now widely used by many other ornithological atlas schemes. The code is slightly modified for ABBA purposes and is given on page 2. Each atlas square has a unique reference made up from the two letters of the axis along the top of the map and the two numerals from the axis on the

continued on page 4



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Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

إشراف
الجنة الوطنية لحماية الحياة البرية والنباتات
الرياض - المملكة العربية السعودية

ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA

Atlas coverage

All the territories of the states of the Arabian Peninsula including their islands and permanent oil platforms etc, in the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea and Red Sea. This includes the Arabian Gulf Islands occupied by Iran since 1971, Socotra and the Abd el Kuri Islands, and the Egyptian administered islands of Tiran and Sinai. The map has no political significance and it should be noted that many international boundaries, especially in southern parts of the peninsula, are ill-defined and in places disputed.

BREEDING EVIDENCE CODE

The following Breeding Evidence Codes are those to be shown in column 4 of Form 3.

Present

XX Highly sedentary species observed at any time (applies only to those species identified on Form 2).

0 Species observed in the breeding season.

Possibly breeding

- 1 Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat.
- 2 Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in the breeding season.

Probably breeding

- 3 Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season.
- 4 Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song, etc) on at least two different days, a week or more apart, at the same place.
- 5 Display and courtship.
- 6 Visiting probable nest-site.
- 7 Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adult(s).
- 8 Brood patch on adult examined in the hand, indicating probably incubating.
- 9 Building nest or excavating nest-hole.

Confirmed breeding

- 10 Distraction display or injury feigning.
- 11 Used nest or egg shell found.
- 12 Recently fledged young (nidicolous species) or downy young (niditugous species).
- 13 Adult(s) entering or leaving nest site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nests or nest-holes, the contents of which cannot be seen) or adult(s) seen sitting on the nest.
- 14 Adult(s) carrying food for young or faecal sac.
- 15 Nest containing eggs.
- 16 Nest with young seen or heard.

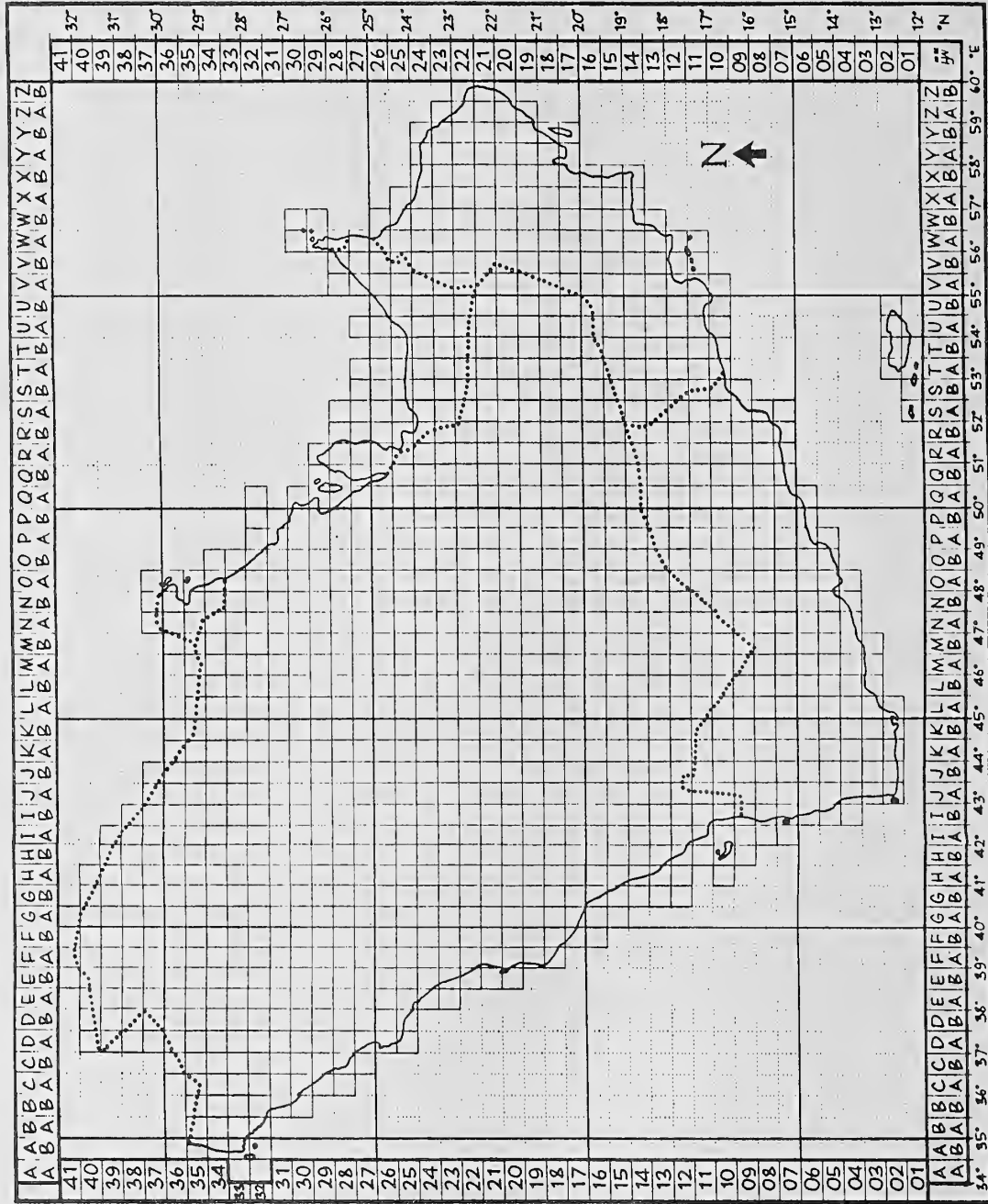
The Arabian Peninsula

Much of Arabia is arid desert but even deserts provide a variety of habitats. There is a rich range of other habitats including montane juniper forest, permanent water courses and coastal mangrove swamps. In recent years a host of manmade habitats have enabled species to breed that did not do so previously and others have been helped to extend their range through the influence of man. The avifauna is enriched further because Arabia stands at a pivotal position in respect of Old World zoogeography.

The peninsula is predominantly Palearctic but there is a very strong Afrotropical influence in the south west, whilst the east has a flavour of Oriental species. With this variety of habitat and influences on the avifauna a total of more than 200 species breed, or have bred. The atlas project will undoubtedly add many more species to the list of breeding birds and lead to a much greater understanding of the range and occurrence of each.

Finding a square

To refer to a square use the two letters in the axis along the top and the two numbers in the axis on the left. These equate to the co-ordinates of the south west corner of the square, eg UA25 is the square bounded by 2°N to the south and 54°E to the west. The largest scale map available should be consulted by contributors to identify accurately each square visited.





Observer's Report Sheet

See notes overleaf

Observer's Report Sheet

See notes overleaf

Observer	Country
Observer's Reference	Period covered by report

Observer	Country
Observer's Reference	Period covered by report

Office Use	Assoc No	Key Codes	C	D
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Office Use	Assoc No	Key Codes	C	D
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1 Species name	2 Species Code	3 Square Ref	4 BEC	5 Date (day, month, year)	6 Remarks (continue overleaf)	7 Leave blank
1						
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5						
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25						

1 Species name	2 Species Code	3 Square Ref	4 BEC	5 Date (day, month, year)	6 Remarks (continue overleaf)	7 Leave blank
1 Egyptian Vulture	247	MA25	03	2.2.94	Birds 20725 Janus	
2 "	247	MA26	01	12.3.94		
3 Griffon Vulture	251	MA26	13	4.4.94	See note	
4 Long-legged Buzzard	288	MB25	11	6.6.94	See note	
5 Kestrel	304	MA25	01	15.94	Seen throughout May	
6 Barbary Falcon	321	MA25	00	3.6.94		
7 "	321	MB26	07	12.4.94		
8 Sand Pterodactyl	363	MA25	01	1.7.94		
9 "	363	MB25	XX	30.8.94		
10 "	363	MB26	XX	78.94	Coveys of 9	
11 Cream C. Cowbird	464	MA26	15	3.4.94	2 eggs	
12 Hygocorins	?	MB26	05	21.4.94	See note	
13 Arabian Babbling	1579	MA25	12	1.4.94	2 very young juvs in nest of 8.	
14 Great G. Shrike	1520	MA26	16	3.3.94	See note	
15 "	1520	MA25	03	4.4.94	Song 26.3.94	
16 "	1520	MB25	02	21.2.94		
17 Common Nighth	1587	MB26	06	17.4.94	See note	
18 House Sparrow	1591	MB26	09	20.3.94		
19 "	1591	MA26	01	22.3.94		
20 "	1591	KA26	01	20.4.94		
21 Brown-necked Raven	1571	MA25	16	23.3.94	See note	
22 Turnstone Finch	1676	MB25	00	28.1.94	Flock of 200	
23 "	1676	MA25	08	16.4.94	Pair and singing	
24 "	1676	MA26	01	14.5.94	♀ With brood patch	
25 "	1676	MB26	14	26.4.94		

Notes

- Observers may place their own sheet identifying mark in the space provided to permit future ease of reference.
- Species should, if possible, be arranged in the order of Form 2. The Species Code is the four digit number shown on that form, the Square Reference and the Breeding Evidence Code (BEC) (XX and 0-16) are shown on Form 1. Only the highest BEC need be shown for each species/square but repeat information for all confirmed breeding occurrences (BEC 10-16), with notes of habitat, breeding period, nest site, clutch size, etc, would always be valued. Only show one record per line. Dates must be given in the format day/month/year, eg 14/06/91. Only give one date in column 5; extra information and dates can be given in the Remarks column or as a note on the reverse.
- The Remarks space (column 6) may be used to report brief comments on breeding or habitat, eg '3 eggs' or '40 pairs in colony'. More detailed notes should be made on the reverse, or in an accompanying note, cross referring to the appropriate line entry (1-25). Activities that are accurately described by the BEC definition need not be mentioned. Observers wishing to place any embargo on a record should mention this in the Remarks column.

It is recommended that ABBA Observer's Report Sheets should be copied to your local ornithological recorder, if one exists.

When complete this Report Sheet should be sent to -

Michael C Jennings, 1 Warners Farm, Warners Drive, Somersham, Cambridgeshire PE17 3HW, England

Remarks (continued from overleaf)

Line 3: Griffon Vulture A small colony on the Tunnig Escarpment, about 5 pairs - nest sites spread along 200m of cliffs. Two birds sitting on nests on ledges and two others visited ledges where there were almost certainly nests. Locality visited regularly during April & May; 15 adults in air together at dusk on 26 April.

Line 4: Long-legged Buzzard. Cliff nest site located only after young had left nest. 3 juveniles seen 1km to SW on 12 June possibly from this site). Pair regularly seen in area April & May. Under the nest were eggshells and remains of many lizards and a hare.

Line 12: Hygocichla Small parties present all winter, from early April some song heard and later aerial displays by ♂♂. Last seen 29.4.91.

Line 14: Great Grey Shrike 3 nested young in nest in Acacia tortilis 1.5m above ground. Nest scruffily constructed of grasses and lined with feathers, wool & rags.

Line 17: Common Mynah Visiting presumed nest site in lamp post. No evidence to suggest breeding despite close watch over next few days.

Line 21: Brown-necked Raven Three nests found in this square:-
Nest 1: 23.3.91. 2 young (74 days old) in acacia tree, 3m above ground level.

Nest 2: 28.2.91. 5 eggs, nest 25m up electricity pylon

Nest 3: 4.3.91 4 eggs, nest in acacia, 2m above ground level.

Notes

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Remarks (continued from overleaf)

there are lists of vagrants and a bibliography. Indices are in Arabic by scientific and English name.

Hardback, 228 pages (245 x 275 mm). Price 15 Bahrain Dinars (150 SR). Published by Bahrain Centre for Research and Studies, PO Box 496, Manama, Bahrain.

Journals Reports & other publications:

Most international ornithological publications give listings from time to time of recent literature, which include papers concerning birds in Arabia. Of note is the Ornithological Society of the Middle East periodic roundup of all ornithological publications for the Middle East area which appear in its bulletin. However publications of the various natural history and bird groups in Arabia and official conservation organisations do not always get reviewed. The aim of this note is to list some of the more interesting papers concerning birds and other wildlife which have appeared in local natural history newsletters and in other reports etc in Arabia in recent months. Space does not permit the full citation of each article but further information can be obtained from the various societies and organisations shown. Note that in addition to the main papers listed regular features such as recent reports, brief notes etc, appear in virtually all the newsletters quoted.

Arabian Wildlife - new periodical

With the arrival of the first edition of *Arabian Wildlife* in January 1994 Arabian ecophiles have their own full colour glossy magazine. The first issue is 36 pages (including six pages of adverts) and is printed in full colour throughout. It is sponsored by the NCWCD Riyadh and published by Planet Publishing Limited, London. The editorial board is mainly comprised of NCWCD associates. The first issue features articles on greater flamingos in the UAE, the re-introduction of the Arabian oryx in Saudi Arabia, sharks in the seas around Arabia, dolphins in Oman and Red Sea wildlife. There are other features on the seabird and turtle sanctuaries in the Arabian Gulf and an article on ABBA. Like all good newsletters it also has a section of recent news snippets, letters, and book reviews. The first issue also has a competition for Arabian wildlife photographers. Number 2 appeared in July 1994, slightly bigger at 44 pages (7 pages of adverts). It included main articles on the trials and tribulations of the captive breeding programme for Houbara in Saudi Arabia; birds at al Ansab lagoons Oman; dugongs, mountain flowers in UAE, turtles in Oman and Farasan Islands diving/marine life. Other features included the Arabian leopard and the extinct Arabian onager. Number 3 came out in January 1995 and contained much of interest for birdwatchers, including a note on the birds of western Saudi Arabia, avifaunal changes in Qatar in recent years, tracking houbara by satellite, and notes on photographing birds from a hide. Other main articles concern the health of the Arabian Gulf two years on from the worst oil spill in history, Arabian hedgehogs, shark conservation, the startling flora and fauna of Socotra Island and mangroves in the UAE. This attractive format magazine will sell well to the foreign and expatriate communities inside and outside of Arabia

although one would suspect that there are hardly enough potential customers to make it commercially viable. There are rumours that the journal will be translated into Arabic which will be most welcome. At the moment there is no good general environmental publication available in Arabic but there is clearly a huge interest and market for such a periodical. Available from Planet Publishing Limited, 20 Berkeley Street, London, W1X 5AE UK. The cost of the first three issues is £2.50 each.

Newsletter of the Historical Association of Oman - new periodical

The first issue of this new publication is dated June 1993 and No 2 appeared in December 1993. It aims to provide a forum for short articles on archaeology, geography, geology, natural history and the cultural and social heritage of the Sultanate of Oman and its neighbours. It is expected that several issues will appear each year. Number one is devoted to Natural History. The main articles concern soil algae, a new species of gecko from the Jebel Akhdar, butterfly migration, seaweed and ant-lions. (Some spare copies of issue one are available from the ABBA Co-ordinator free of charge, send SAE). The second issue has articles on Oman's scorpions, the white oryx project, juniper woodlands and Arabian tahr among others. There is also a review of recent publications in each issue. *Details of membership and subscriptions are available from the secretary of the Historical Association of Oman, PO Box 3941, Ruwi 112, Sultanate of Oman.*

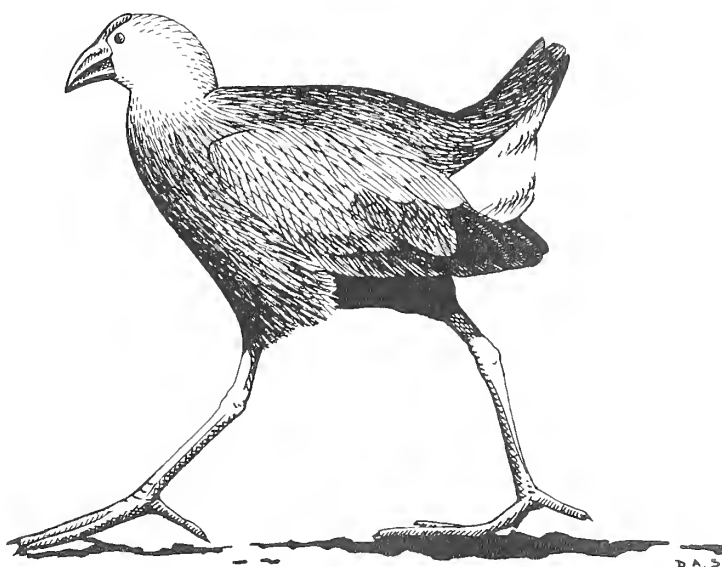


Fig 6. The purple gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio* seems long overdue as a breeding bird for Arabia - did it breed at Jahra Pool Kuwait? See article by Charles Pilcher on page 18.

Oman Bird News

No 15 (Winter 1993/94) and No 16 (Summer 1994) contain articles on Arabian nightjars; Socotra cormorant harvested for food on the Kuria Muria and Socotra islands; spring migration

in interior Oman and spring in Musandam. *Available from Oman Bird Group, c/o Natural History Museum, PO Box 668, Muscat, Oman.*

Tribulus

The October 1993 issue (Vol 3:2) has an article of the 1993 breeding of flamingo in the UAE. The April 1994 issue (Vol 4.1) contains a most interesting account of the birds seen during Simon Aspinall's visit to Yasat, Ghaghan and Kafai islands west of Abu Dhabi, as well as recent reports of rare birds. *Available from the Emirates Natural History Group, PO Box 2380, Abu Dhabi, UAE.*

Sandgrouse

The most recent volume available Vol 14; Part 2 was dated 1992 (but appeared in mid 1994). Its four main articles all concerned Arabia; seabirds off Dhofar, flamingoes at Dubai, mountain nightjar, and Wadi Rima habitats in Yemen. Shorter notes covered new birds in Bahrain and an extralimital Temminck's horned lark in Yemen.

OSME Bulletin

The spring 1994 issue (No 32) has notes on the Tihama birds of Saudi Arabia, 'pied' brown-necked ravens on the Farasan Islands and a question about the possibility of kingfishers *Alcedo atthis* nesting in western Arabia. The autumn 1994 issue (No 33) records the first occurrence of the Senegal thick-knee (a potential breeding bird) in the south west of Saudi Arabia. There are several other papers and notes relevant to Arabian migrants and visitors. *Sandgrouse* and the *OSME Bulletin* are available from OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, UK.

Emirates Bird Report No 18

This bumper issue, 131 pages, reaches new heights of interest and readability. The major article is the UAE bird report for 1993 (80+ pages), which includes month by month diary and a systematic listing of the 309 species seen in the UAE during 1993. This included species new for the Emirates; golden plover, black tern, Blyth's pipit, greenish warbler and Cetti's warbler. The last is a potential breeding bird for Arabia and it was singing in a reedbed. At the end of 1993 there were 395 species on the Emirates list (includes feral breeders). The annual report has numerous statistics of the activities of birdwatchers in the Emirates, including an analysis of numbers of birds seen each month, October saw the most species with a staggering 237, no wonder birding tourists are flocking to the UAE these days. The least species were seen in July with a mere 106, which is actually very high considering the withering climate in the lower Arabian Gulf in high summer and the majority of birders finding a good reason to migrate themselves to a cooler part of the world. Other articles cover the NARC Ringing Scheme, lesser kestrel migration, an important paper

booted warblers breeding in the UAE, and several papers on firsts, including the black tern, golden plover, Blyth's pipit and Blyth's reed warbler, as well as the first confirmed breeding of cream-coloured courser in the UAE. There is a roundup to the Asian Waterfowl Census 1994 and an article on kleptoparasitism. This issue has been compiled and edited by Colin Richardson and is published by the Emirates Bird Records Committee. *Available from the EBRC PO Box 50394, Dubai, UAE; price Dhs 35 or £7 (includes airmail p&p), cheques to be made out to Colin Richardson.*

Zoology in the Middle East Vols 8, 9 & 10 (1993-4)

Volume No 8 has 9 papers, 6 on invertebrates. Of the 3 papers on vertebrates one concerns the status of leopard in Turkey. The two bird papers cover exotic birds imported into Jedda and a review of the status, distribution and conservation of the Socotra cormorant. Volume No 9 has 13 papers, 7 on invertebrates. The non-bird vertebrate papers cover the weasel and Egyptian mongoose in Egypt and new snakes for Syria. The three papers on birds include an esoteric work (in German) on ancient records of Eurasian collared dove in Asia (it is known west of the Zagros as a pet of the Ottoman court from the 16th Century). Another paper records the first occurrence of the olive-backed pipit in Turkey (April 1992). The most interesting paper charts the breeding success (316 young) of Abdim's stork in Yemen during 1993. It provides lots of useful information on distribution, breeding season and biology of a bird little studied in Arabia. They now nest on electricity pylons. Vol No 10 has 10 papers, 3 on invertebrates. The three bird papers cover observations from recent ornithological trips to Yemen (in German), a record of American Golden Plover in Turkey and the first breeding of desert wheatear in Turkey. A contents list of all papers in the first 10 volumes has been produced and is issued with Volume 10. *Soft cover, A5 size. Available from Max Kasperek, Verlag, Bleichstrasse 1, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany, Price 27DM each issue. ISBN 3.925064-16-8, ISSN 0939-7140.*

***Western Palearctic and South West Asia Waterfowl Census 1993* by P M Rose & V Taylor (1993)**

Contains reports from 57 sites in Arabia (all states except Bahrain), with a total of almost half a million birds recorded. Card covers, A5 size report, 215 pages. Price not known. *Published by International Waterfowl & Wetlands Research Bureau, Slimbridge, Gloucester, GL2 7BX, UK.*

***The status of coastal and marine habitats two years after the Gulf war oil spill* by A Abuzinada and F Krupp (Editors): 1994**

The oil spill that effected the northern Arabian Gulf towards the end of the Gulf War in 1991 was the biggest oil pollution incident the world had ever seen. It hit a large area of the Saudi Arabian Gulf coast which was already stressed through natural and man-induced actions. The oil pollution incident deposited a thick mass of oil on the northern Gulf coast of

Saudi Arabia and in view of strong onshore winds, high tides and the low lying aspect of the coastal regions, many deposits were pushed far inland. The intertidal zone was severely effected and the upper intertidal region almost completely inundated over large areas. The full effects of the oiling incident are not entirely realised because many of the oiled regions were quickly covered by clean sand. This report of the Saudi Arabian/European Commission Environmental Team which was established in the Gulf since the war concerns several areas of marine and littoral biology. It contains 13 papers one of which concerns birds. The others cover intertidal vegetation, coral reefs, fish populations, crab fauna, sea grass and algae mats and cetaceans. The paper on birds looks at the effect on wading species and seabirds in the region, although it quickly admits that the lack of knowledge of bird numbers before the spill gives no sound basis on which to compare results. At least 30,000 birds or so are known to have been killed by the spill, including large numbers of grebes which were not previously known to winter in the northern Gulf in such numbers. Things could have been a lot worse because waders apparently left the area shortly after the oiling incident and breeding seabirds only arrived to breed in mid-summer, several months after the main oil deposits had come ashore. Drastic declines in breeding success of seabirds in 1992 has been identified although it is not clear yet whether the lack of fish prey species, which caused the decline, was a direct result of the oil spill in some way. From autumn 1992 large numbers of waders returned to the Gulf on migration. Soft cover, 80 pages (A4 size). Price not known. Published as *Courier Forschungsinsitut Senckenberg No 166*. Available from *Senckenbergischen. Naturforschenden Gesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main, Germany*. ISSN 0341-4116/ISBN 3-929907-05-4.

Society News:

Emirates Natural History Group (Al Ain)

New address is PO Box 18057, Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Yemen Ornithological Society

The civil war in Yemen has sadly set back the country at least a decade, and left in its wake bitterness, an awful lot of reconstruction to do, and deep wounds to heal. Against this background the newly emerging enthusiasm for wildlife conservation, which was about to find expression in a national conference in the week the war started, has inevitably foundered. Travel has been largely constrained, security has been tight and people have had more on their minds than conservation proposals. Despite all this there are one or two encouraging pointers to possible progress in the future. The minister responsible for the Environmental Protection Council has been to the UK to look at wildlife conservation programmes and has returned with a firm commitment to address the proposals in the BirdLife International Middle East IBA book. A Yemeni scientist here who was a member of the OSME expedition to south Yemen in 1993, read a paper at the world conference of BirdLife in Germany in the summer and has been

appointed Yemen's representative. He is currently mobilising opinion here in favour of establishing an NGO to address the IBA proposals with support from the EPC. All this is encouraging and hopefully bodes well for future action in Yemen when the political and economic disruption settles and it is possible again to address problems of conservation and biodiversity. In the meantime lammergeiers still soar over the Mahwit jebel, bustards still haunt the Tihama and waders still fill the coasts and Taiz marshes as winter comes again. We hope to establish the presence of bald ibis this winter as our top priority and look forward to calmer times ahead.

Derek Harvey, YOS Coordinator, c/o Clyde Petroleum, P O Box 16133, Sana'a Republic of Yemen.

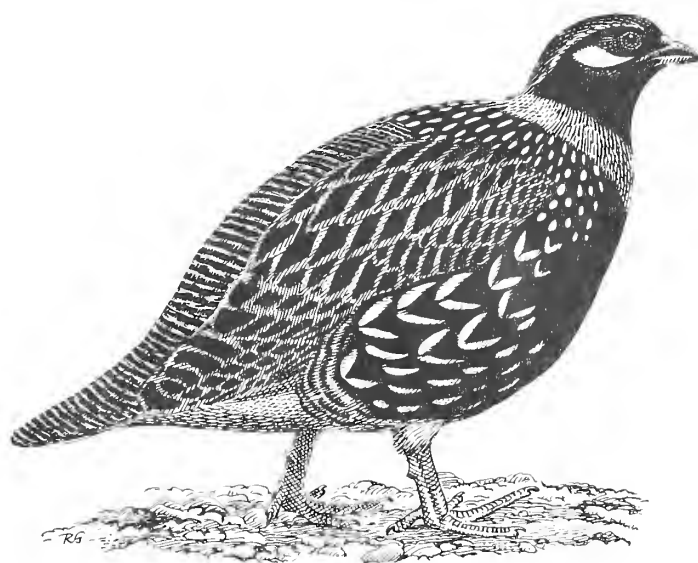


Fig 7. A few old records of the black francolin *Francolinus francolinus* from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia may have been natural occurrences. In recent years it has been introduced in the UAE, including to Sir Bani Yas island SB25 (D Robinson) and Abu al Abyad island TB25 (S J Aspinall).

Kuwait Ornithological Rarities Committee

In March 1994 an initiative was taken to establish a rarities committee in Kuwait and the newly created Kuwait Ornithological Rarities Committee (KORC) held its first meeting on 3rd April 1994. The Committee confirmed Charles Pilcher as Chairman and agreed that during the first year the duties of Secretary would also attach to that position. Three other members complete the Committee, which has the following membership: Charles Pilcher (Chairman and Secretary), Peter Cowan, S. Thomas Spencer and Bryon Wright (until 30.9.94). George Gregory was elected to the Committee from 1 October 1994.

The function of the Committee is to assess reports of rare birds

in Kuwait with a view to inclusion in the Country List. It will operate according to the guidelines agreed at the international meeting of rarities committees in the Netherlands in October 1991 (British Birds 86:301). Because of its smaller than optimal membership, the KORC will call on external expertise as a regular practice, which is in accordance with guideline 11. The Committee will also undertake a review of old, exceptional records as recommended in guideline 8.

Observers are requested to submit their records to the Secretary at this address: Professor Charles Pilcher, Faculty of Medicine, PO Box 24923 Safat, KUWAIT.

Oman Bird Records Committee

The Oman BRC and Bird Group have recently published (1994) issue 4 of the *Oman Bird List*. It contains all bird species (432) accepted by the Oman Bird Records Committee up to January 1994. The list provides status by region, periods of occurrence and commonality for each species. Card covers, A5 size with central staple (36 pages). Price not known. Available from Oman Bird Records Committee, PO Box 246, Muscat 113, Sultanate of Oman.

The palm dove in Kuwait and an unusual nest

The palm dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* was first recorded in Kuwait city in April 1975, and the single bird noted then appears to have been regarded as an escapee. It was not reported again until the spring of 1981, when one bird was seen in the company of four mynahs, reinforcing the notion that this species was introduced. However, during the next five years the palm dove had colonised most suburbs and, as I reported in *Phoenix* 6:9, by 1989 it had spread to the townships of Jahra and Faheheel. House owners have long been urged to plant trees and shrubs in their gardens to augment urban parks and the 'greening' activities of the municipal planners. The rapid urbanisation of the past three decades therefore produced a great and rather sudden increase in suitable habitats, which undoubtedly encouraged colonisation by this species. Moreover, its very extended breeding season in Kuwait, from late August to early June (and may even be year round), and multiple broods, must also have contributed to the great speed of population growth.

In Kuwait the great adaptability of this dove in exploiting sites for nesting is very evident. The first nest that I was able to observe directly was sited about 5 m up in a date palm close to the trunk, in the axil of a frond and was simply a loose platform of twigs. The pair produced their first brood in late February and I was surprised to see that the female was incubating eggs again whilst the fully fledged young of that brood were still returning to the nest. Some time later I saw palm doves nesting in a narrow gap between two parapets of a single storey building. During the past year and a half there has been one pair nesting in each of the two broad-leaved trees *Ficus altissimus* in my garden.

The main purpose of this note is to describe an unusual nest which I observed in April 1990 on the sixth floor of an apartment block in Salmiyah (to the east of Kuwait City). The nest, which was on a drainpipe was sited against the north wall of the central well of the building, slightly less than a metre down from the top of the parapet. The sixth floor is the top floor and I was able to see the nest clearly from the roof by leaning over the parapet. It had been built across the top of a pair of drainpipes and was partly protected on one side by a large diameter (about 20 cm) ventilator pipe. The plane of the north wall is actually ENE-WSW, which ensured that the nest lacked shade and was in direct sunlight during the hottest hours of the day. I estimated that the nest was about 25 m above the ground.

It was a surprise to discover that the nest had been constructed almost entirely of insulated wires loosely woven to form a very shallow cup. The pieces of wire were of different thicknesses and colours and it was obvious that they had been collected from the roof top. All around the central well the area was littered with such pieces, which had been discarded during repairs and maintenance to the various air conditioning installations. By measuring the diameters of discarded pieces of colours comparable to those in the nest structure it was possible to obtain an indication of the thickness of the wires used. A high proportion of pieces forming the floor of the cup were 1.55 mm thick but thinner strands of 1.4 mm were also interwoven. The thickest wire used appears to have been 3.65 mm in diameter. However, there was also a length of what appears to have been high-pressure tubing with a braided cover, and this was probably about 5 mm thick. It was difficult to estimate the lengths of the wires but the longest was probably more than 60 cm; it traversed the nest and hung down at least 30 cm from the rim. There was no lining at the time of inspection and the structure was heavily fouled with droppings.

Palm dove resembles other western palearctic columbids, for example wood pigeon *Columba palumbus* and Eurasian collared dove *S. decacoto*, in showing a wide variation in the choice of nesting sites. Nests of this species on drainpipes and under eaves have been noted, so the siting of the nest described above is not particularly unusual, although it was higher above the ground than is typical (Cramp et al., 1985 *The Birds of the Western Palearctic* Vol IV). However, the extensive use of artificial materials as in this instance appears to be very unusual and has not previously been reported. A review of the major reference literature, conducted with the kind help of Dr Peter Cowan, failed to find any indication of the use of materials other than from plant sources. It should be noted, however, that palm dove is not unique among columbids in the use of wire as a construction material. Nests made partially or entirely of wire have been described for Eurasian collared dove, and turtle dove *S. turtur* has been reported as using rusty wire (Cramp et al., 1985).

C W T Pilcher, Faculty of Medicine, PO Box 24923 Safat, Kuwait.

P.S. After this article was prepared George Gregory informed me that palm doves had recently built a wire nest on the window sill of a first floor classroom at the Kuwait English School. Two eggs were hatched on 2 October 1994.

Sites of Interest:

This column aims to provide details of the variety and diversity of bird habitats throughout Arabia and the representative birds to be found in each. The series of site reports appearing in the issues of *Phoenix* are not meant to be a "where to watch birds in Arabia" or a directory to the most prolific bird sites, although a number of them are exceptionally good bird areas.

Observers are asked to submit details of other sites, especially those that they have studied reasonably well, drawing special attention to the breeding and resident species that occur. A site may be as small as a sewage pond or similar microsite, an urban area or a whole mountain range.

Abu Dhabi's Seabird Islands

In June 1994 several staff of the UAE National Avian Research Centre (NARC), surveyed 40 different islands off western Abu Dhabi and achieved the first ever comprehensive inventory of the breeding seabirds of the area. Many of the islands had never received attention of this kind before and some are seldom even visited.

numbers of Saunders' little terns *S. saundersi* were recorded and although their young were already fledged and away by the time of our visit, most appear to prefer to breed closer to the coast on the inshore islands.

Certain islands, predictably enough, held more birds than others. Qarneyn (SB26) excelled with all of the swift terns, c20,000 lesser crested, 14,600 bridled and 1,050 white-cheeks. This is quite apart from its 200+ pairs of sooty gull *Larus hemprichii* and winter-breeding red-billed tropicbirds *Phaethon aetherens*. Yassat (RB25), Dayina (SA26), Muhaiymat (RB26) and the islands off Sir Bani Yas (SB25) also hold populations of one or more species that easily qualify as being of international importance. At the minute we refrain from expressing UAE populations as percentages of the total Gulf population of each species, as there is new data still to come in from Saudi Arabia and the surveys are not yet finished here in the UAE. Also the current situation on the Iranian side of the Arabian Gulf is unclear.

Depressingly, the former seabird importance of Zirku (TA26), Arzanah (SB26) and Delma (SA26), now seems to have receded altogether. The situation on Zirku is particularly depressing for

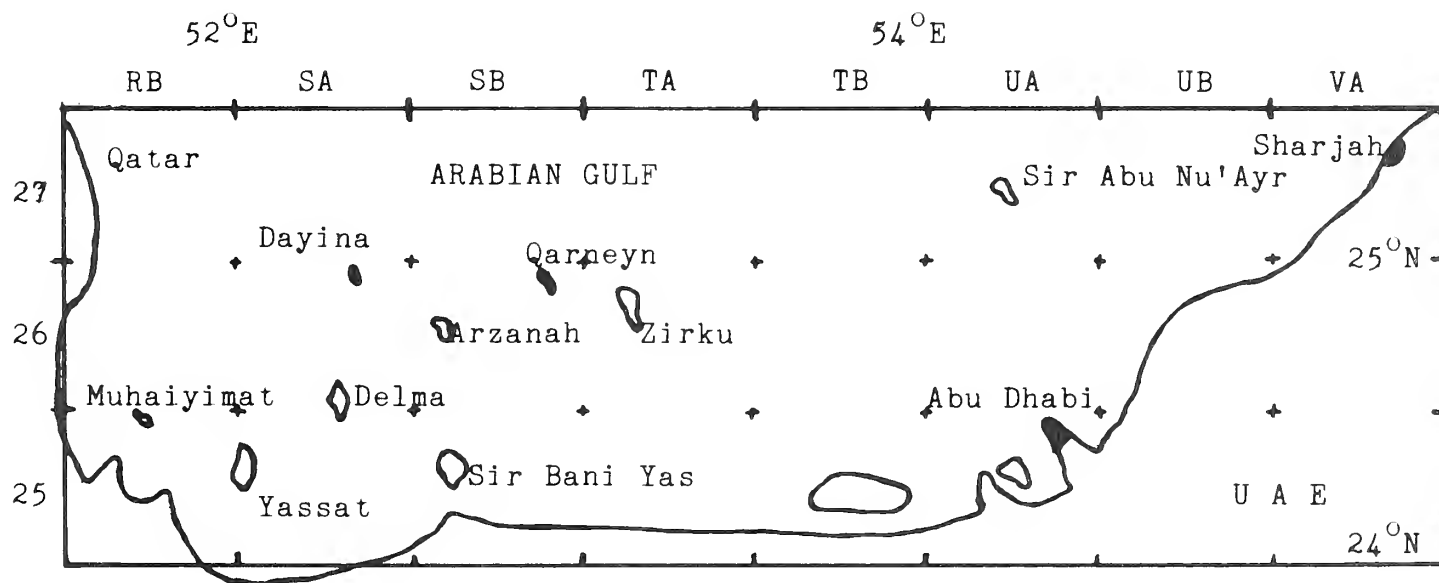


Fig 8. Location of the islands visited during the NARC survey of June 1994. (Sir Abu Nu'Ayr was not visited).

The numbers of breeding terns were the most impressive find: 1,256 pairs of swift tern *Sterna bergii* in a single colony; four colonies of lesser crested tern *S. benghalensis* totalling 24,503 pairs; ten main colonies of bridled tern *S. anaethetus* with 30,500 pairs in total and 20,100 pairs of white-checked tern *S. repressa* spread through eight large, and several minor, colonies. These represent the bulk of the UAE's breeding seabird colonies although some inshore islands, for example around Abu Dhabi island, remain to be counted. No other extant UAE colonies are known for swift and lesser crested terns, although some of the latter may still breed on Sir Abu Nu'Ayr island, Sharjah (UA27). More bridled and white-checked tern colonies are known and these should also be counted next year. Only small

it once held up to 10,000 pairs of Socotra cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*, several hundred pairs of sooty gulls and 500 tropicbirds. Zirku and Arzanah will be re-visited in winter 1994/95 to establish whether the tropicbirds have also disappeared as breeding birds.

On the credit side the survey also chronicled a second Arabian Gulf colony of sooty gull, albeit only numbering 20 pairs; two new Socotra cormorant colonies and a dozen breeding pairs of sooty falcon *Falco concolor*. A herd of Dugongs *Dugong dugon* was also encountered and this animal is now to be studied further. Turtle nesting beaches and archaeological remains were also found and mapped. All these findings were rather timely as the UAE chapter prepared for the forthcoming Middle East Wetland Inventory has incorporated all these results. Alas the data arrived too late for inclusion in BirdLife International's *Important Bird Areas of the Middle East*.

The conservation of UAE's seabird islands is likely to feature prominently in the next year or two. A short film was made on the birdlife of Qarneyn late on in the breeding season and some readers may have seen the resulting feature on CNN and the BBC. Great interest is now being shown towards wildlife in this country and progress is being made in the right direction. Surveys are to be continued and a monitoring scheme set up in 1995. Ensuring safeguards and appropriate management of the most important sites will be a priority for the Conservation Department of NARC.

Simon Aspinall, NARC, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

ABBA Survey No. 16: North central and north west Saudi Arabia; Spring 1994

ABBA Survey No 16 was to north central and north western parts of Saudi Arabia, over the period 29 March to 14 April 1994. I was accompanied throughout by Hafiz A. Yahya and, for the last week, by Mohamed al Salamah, both of the NCWCD Riyadh.

Records were collected from a total of 54 atlas squares (472 records), although for a variety of reasons a dozen or so squares received only a cursory coverage. About 20-25 squares were covered in detail and in 10 squares, 16 or more potentially breeding birds were noted. Altogether some 109 species were recorded, including 57 species which were regarded as breeding or potentially breeding in at least one of the atlas squares.

The simplified itinerary of the survey was as follows. Yahya and I left Riyadh at midday on 30 March and camped just south west of Hail that evening. From 31 March to 3 April we visited the southern edge of the Nafud desert and the sandstone jebels north of the Hail to Jaharah road, including the Jebels Hibran, Suhayyah, Misma, az Zalma and Irnan. (There were no records on the ABBA database for this whole area). After this

we crossed the broken sandstone country between Tayma and al Ula. From al Ula we travelled to Tabuk below the western edge of the highlands, from Beda to ad Disah. We were joined at Tabuk on the evening of 6 April by Mohamed al Salamah. During 7-9 April, after briefly visiting some wetland sites near Tabuk, we spent two nights in the Jebel al Lawz area, before moving east of Tabuk. The period 10-12 April was spent returning slowly to Riyadh, making diversions to Jebel Rayah (DA34), the northern edge of the Harrat Khaybah, and Jebel Jildiyah (northeast of Hail). 13 April was spent at the NCWCD office in Riyadh and the 14 April at sites on the Tuwaiq escarpment and the Wadi Hanifah, south of Riyadh. A map showing the route taken during the survey is shown at Fig 9. Positioning was by a hand-held GPS receiver (important sites were waypointed) and altitude was measured using a pocket altimeter.

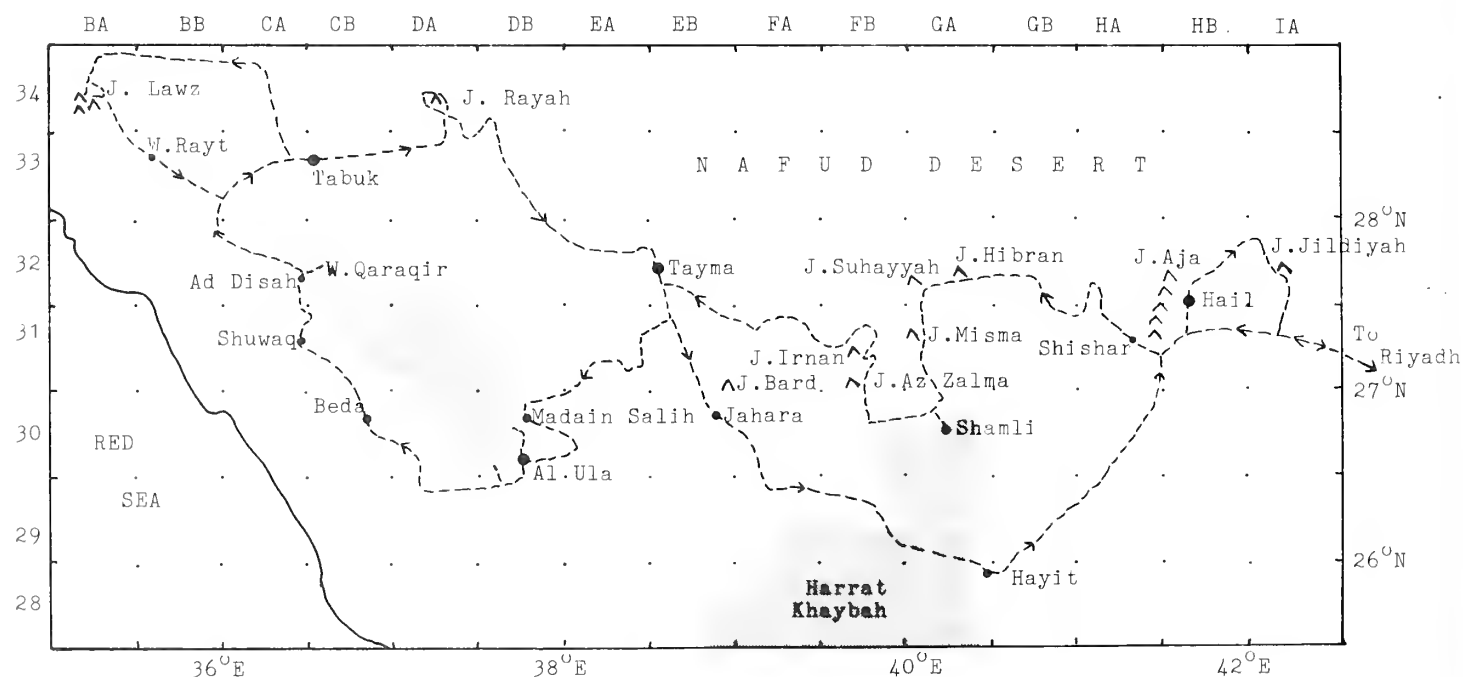
The survey had the use of a 4-wheel drive GMC suburban station wagon provided by the NCWCD Riyadh. Accommodation was by camping, except for a hotel in Tabuk 6 April and at Riyadh.

Records for a number of breeding/resident species and comments on their range and status are as follows:

Griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus*

Widespread and common in the sandstone jebels north of the Jaharah to Hail road, several likely nesting colonies located. About 40 present at a large sandstone outcrop near Madain Salih, where nestlings were also heard. One over Jebel al Lawz, 7 April and two on the northern edge of the Harrat Khaybah, 11 April.

Fig 9. Route taken on ABBA Survey No 16 to north central and north west Saudi Arabia, March - April 1994. The shaded areas are lava fields (harrats).



Lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*

Two GA32, 1 April; one long dead on an old nest DA33, 9 April. A total of seven birds and old nests northern Harrat Khaybah and just south of Hail, 10 and 11 April.

Barbary falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*

One Jebel Irnan, 3 April.

Chukar *Alectoris chukar*

A few upper Wadi Lakus (BA34), 8 April and heard in the evening the same day in hills of Wadi Rayt (BB33). The latter record is a small, 40 km, range extension to the southeast.

Lichtenstein's sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii*

Two near Beda, 6 April. A range extension of approx 100 km northwest.

African collared dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*

A few (identification confirmed by song) DA30 and Beda (CB30), 5 April and also CA31, 6 April. These records extend the range of this species some 200 km to the northwest.

Pallid swift *Apus pallidus*

Two pairs GA32, 1 April; twenty pairs Jebel az Zalma, 2 April and a few at a sandstone butte south west of Madain Salih, 5 April.

Black-crowned finchlark *Eremopterix nigriceps*

Two by the road approx 200 km northwest of Riyadh, 30 March. A single bird just north of Beda on 6 April was some 300 km further northwest than any previous record.

Dunn's lark *Eremalanda dunnii*

A few HA31, 31 March; a pair GA31, 1 April; a few EA31, 4 April and IA32, 11 April.

Thick-billed lark *Ramphocoris clotbey*

One, possibly two, pairs in a wide, open, stony wadi, west of the Wadi Abyad (BA34), 7 April. This breeding season record extends the Arabian potential breeding range of the species about 250 km westwards.

Temminck's horned lark *Eremophila bilopha*

One GA31, 2 April; two pairs northern Harrat Khaybah, FB29, 11 April. Also common IA32 and IA31, 11 April. The Harrat Khaybah records are on the extreme southern edge of the species range.

Tawny pipit *Anthus campestris*

Small numbers in the plains immediately west of Jebel Aja, 31 March and 1 April. In the western highlands, 5-11 April, a number were recorded including pairs and individuals behaving territorially indicating that breeding might take place later.

Mourning wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*

The resident race was found throughout the sandstones between Jebel Aja and Tayma; including Jebel Hibran, Jebel Misma, Jebel az Zalma and Jebel Irnan. Also two or three EA31, 4 April. One BA34, 8 April. These records show that there is a continuous distribution between the previously known populations near Hail and Madain Salih.

Fan-tailed raven *Corvus rhipidurus*

Small numbers in the sandstone jebels south of the Nafud desert and at Jebel Jildiyah which are new areas for the species. Well distributed in small numbers throughout the western highlands. About 120 at a cattle dung tip under the Tuwaiq Escarpment, 14 April.

Desert finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*

Pairs at a pivot irrigation settlement GB32, 31 March and GA32 the next day. A few northeast of Hail, 11 April and one JB31, 12 April. Most of these records represent new areas for the species which is rapidly colonising central Arabia.

Sinai rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus*

Recorded (usually in small groups) Jebel Hibran, GB32, Jebel Misma, Jebel az Zalma, near Madain Salih, Wadi Qaraqir (juveniles), Wadi Lakus BB33, 1-9 April. A few Jebel Jildiyah (IA32), 12 April. This species has not been recorded previously east of Jebel Bard (EB31) so all the records south of the Nafud desert represent a range extension. The record from the Jebel Jildiyah area, east of Hail was most unexpected. (The total range extension is about 340 km eastwards). This species is now known to inhabit all the sandstone areas of northwestern Arabia except the Jebel Tubaiq and the sandstones to the northwest of the Nafud desert.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Hafis Yahya and Mohamed al Salamah for their good company during the survey. I am extremely grateful to the NCWCD for continuing to support the ABBA project, including the field surveys, through the provision of a vehicle, equipment and logistic support. In particular I would like to thank the Secretary General Professor Abdulaziz Abuzinada for his interest and encouragement.

Michael C Jennings.

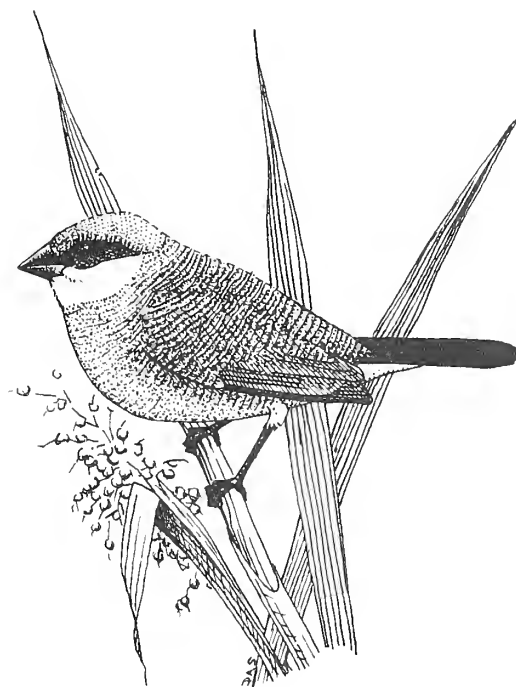


Fig 10. Two flocks of the Arabian waxbill *Estrilda rufibarba* were seen at Tarim (PA09) eastern Yemen by N Redman in October 1993. The easternmost record of this endemic.

Kuwait's Jahra Pool Reserve under threat

The Jahra Pool Reserve, a listed site in *Important Bird Areas of the Middle East* (M I Evans, 1994) is Kuwait's only freshwater wetland, and owes its existence to waste-water outflow from the nearby town. In a country entirely lacking in rivers and natural, standing fresh water it is not surprising that the site is ornithologically important, a claim supported by the fact that over 70% of the 300+ species on the Kuwait List have been recorded there. The Reserve comprises 250 hectares of coastal subkha lying between the town of Jahra and the sea. About 70 hectares are fenced in to offer protection to the main pool (some four or five hectares of open, shallow water) and dense reed beds, which extend out across a small delta to the sea.

Since Kuwait's liberation from Iraqi occupation early in 1991 the reserve has received a fair degree of protection, initially and unintentionally from military security patrols, which discouraged anyone from venturing into the area, and subsequently by the Environment Protection Council's employment of guards on the site. The great reduction in the amount of shooting and disturbance resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of water birds wintering at the Pool and two new breeding records for Kuwait. Little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus* bred in the summers of 1993 and 1994. Moreover, up to five purple gallinules *Porphyrio porphyrio* have been present since first seen by Thomas Spencer and Bryon Wright on 9 September 1992. I suspect that its occurrence on the Reserve may well be the result of the massive destruction of the marshes in southern Iraq. Satellite assessments indicate that close to half the marshlands have now been drained by the Iraqi army.

In 1992 the Kuwait Oil Company inflicted serious and persisting damage on the reserve, when it bulldozed away the east and west gates to widen and consolidate a road across the site. Since then hunters and others have had a route across the marshes, which is both sound and free from the hazards of unexploded ordinance, into the heart of the Reserve. Apparently the Oil Company ignored the protected status of the site and made no attempt to consult with the Environment Protection Council (EPC) at any time.

Since the winter of 1991-92 a more serious and potentially fatal threat to the existence of the Jahra Pool Reserve has arisen. During that winter and the one following, unusually heavy rains caused flooding of the subkha and adjacent parts of Jahra town, which resulted in subsidence damage to buildings and roads. Understandably, this prompted the decision by engineers of the relevant ministries to construct an extensive system of enormous drains to take storm-water away directly into the sea. The new drains cross the reserve and have been under construction since the early part of this year. Unfortunately, all of the engineering plant (stores hangars, cement/gravel hoppers, workshops etc) and portakabins for site offices and accommodation have been located within the fenced area. Whilst it is to be hoped that the damage caused thereby will be temporary and reversible, the fate of a large portion of the subkha is uncertain. The spoil from the main ditch, estimated to exceed 20,000 m³, has been spread and compacted onto the adjacent subkha, obliterating its vegetation and raising the surface level by 0.3-0.5 metres.

However, most damaging of all has been the decision to divert into one of the main drains the very outflow that gives rise to the Pool itself. An alarming and depressing aspect of the scheme was that once again the protected status of the reserve was ignored, with the EPC learning of the threat only after the drainage project has been approved.

To ensure the continued existence of the Jahra Pool the EPC has therefore been forced to seek an undertaking from the ministry to provide an alternative supply of fresh water. It is understood that such an undertaking has been provisionally agreed and water could be piped from a preliminary treatment plant more than a kilometre away. How readily financial approval will be forthcoming for this rather costly solution is questionable and a cause for serious concern, given the Government's current need to severely restrict public spending. Newspapers regularly report on the gloom in Kuwait's civil engineering industry resulting from Government cut-backs, so it is difficult to envisage any priority being given to the Reserve issue. That the problem need never have arisen if the EPC had been consulted at the outset is now beside the point: the Council will need all the encouragement and support that it can muster to preserve this listed important bird area.

Prof C W T Pilcher, Faculty of Medicine, PO Box 24923, Safat, Kuwait.

ABBA and Phoenix notes and notices:

Donations received

Very welcome donations to the ABBA project have been received during 1994 from the Riyadh Natural History Society (£85) and Derek Harvey, Yemen (£25).

Keep sending in the records

Bound into the middle pages of this issue will be found a reduced sized copy of the instructions to contributors, to the project, the standard report form and an example of a completed form. Contributors and potential contributors who do not have a current set of these forms should carefully remove the forms and use them to submit records. Please make enough copies of the report form for your likely use. If you have the facilities please enlarge back to A4 size. Unfortunately space does not permit the reproduction of the current list of Arabian breeding birds, (the Form 2 mentioned in the instructions) which contains the species code. Please write in if you would like a copy of this list of breeding birds and their codes or indeed if you need a supply of A4 sized report forms. The species number is obviously important for the record to get onto the database but do not let not having the number stop you from sending in reports, leave the species code space on the form blank, a number can be added to the form at the office before the

record is added to the database.

There is still much scope for collecting breeding bird information even for the common species in well trodden areas so would all observers please continue to send in records and information for their local area. (Don't forget to copy your ABBA datasheets to the local bird recorder, if there is one). Any outstanding report sheets for 1994 should be sent in as soon as possible.

Index for *Phoenix*

A cumulative index has been prepared for Issues 1-11 of *Phoenix*. This covers all subjects, species names (both by English and scientific names), sites, places, countries, authors, second authors, books reviewed, societies, etc, of everything that has appeared in *Phoenix* to date. Henceforth the cumulative index will be kept up to date with each issue and will be sent to anyone requesting it. (Send SAE).

A Bibliography of Arabian Birds

The last bibliography of Arabian birds was prepared in 1974 by Bill Griffiths (*A Bibliography of the Avifauna of the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant & Mesopotamia*, published by the Army Bird-Watching Society). that publication was updated by two addenda prepared by OSME in 1979 and 1980. The Griffiths bibliography has been invaluable as a reference to the ABBA project since the outset of work in 1984 but as the project moves into the next and final phase of extracting records from literature sources it has been necessary to prepare a new bibliography as a working tool. With the huge amount of material that has been published on Arabian birds in the last two decades, especially by the several local and regional ornithological and natural history groups, this new bibliography is already quite a tome. With proper cross referencing and key-wording the bibliography will be a useful tool for anyone researching Arabian birds and it is therefore intended to publish it in due course. Anyone who needs a rough working copy now or who might be able to contribute references to the new bibliography should write in for one. There will have to be a charge for photocopying and postage.

For Sale: Report on ABBA Surveys 11 & 12 to Oman, UAE and northern Saudi Arabia, February to May 1992 by M C Jennings, M I Al Salamah, C T Richardson, 1994)

This report (71 pages A4) constitutes the results of five weeks atlassing in UAE, central and southern Oman and the poorly visited wastelands of northern Saudi Arabia. In all over 100 atlas squares were visited. The report covers the survey objectives, procedures and methods, some general topographical notes, comments on bird habitats and bird observations. In all 233 species were recorded. The report includes 36 species distribution maps, four other maps, eight habitat photos, itinerary, gazetteer and a list of site waypoints. It is published as NCWCD Technical Report No 35 (August 1994) and costs £12 including postage. Available from M C J.

Photos needed for *Phoenix*

Photos of Arabian breeding birds, their nests, eggs and habitats etc are welcomed for inclusion in future issues of *Phoenix*. Photos may be printed with just a caption, for their aesthetic value, or can be submitted to illustrate notes and papers. Photos may be in colour or black and white (glossy or matt), slides, prints or negatives, so long as they have good contrast.

How to obtain *Phoenix*

One issue of *Phoenix* is published each year. It is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is sent to recent correspondents. A bundle of each issue is also passed to all natural history and similar groups active in Arabia. It is available on subscription for a single payment of £18 (\$37) for the next five issues, i.e. Nos 12 to 16 inclusive. (All subscribers will receive a reminder when their next subscription is due). *Phoenix* Nos 1 - 10 are available at £2 each (or the set for £14) including postage. Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years. Will subscribers and observers please remember to advise any change of address.

Records wanted

Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, are urged to make contact with the Co-ordinator. Old records are especially valuable in assessing population changes and range expansions and contractions. Were there house sparrows *Passer domesticus* in Abu Dhabi in 1960? No one seems to know for sure. Although the project concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is required, notes suggesting possible or probable breeding, particularly unusual breeding species are also very valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed.

Contributions to *Phoenix*

Short articles relevant to the aims of the ABBA project are welcomed, especially notes on new breeding birds, the avifauna of specific areas or studies concerning particular species. Notices, requests for information and advertisements of reports, publications etc are inserted in *Phoenix* free of charge. Submissions need not necessarily be typed. Charges for commercial advertisements and loose inserts are available on request.

The *Phoenix*

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For Sale: ABBA Survey Reports

To date, 16 ABBA surveys have been completed. For each survey a summary report is prepared which includes the itinerary, a map and details of unusual birds seen etc. This is followed later by a full report prepared for the NCWCD, providing all the information collected on bird distribution and numbers. In line with the ABBA policy of making all information collected by the project available to those who want to use it, the summaries and full reports are copied to relevant libraries, museums and societies. In addition, a small number are available for sale. Full reports of Surveys Nos 4 to 12, are currently available. (See details in the sales list accompanying this newsletter).

Farasan osprey study

During March-May 1994, a pilot study on the osprey *Pandion h. haliaetus* in the Farasan archipelago, southern Red Sea, was conducted as a joint venture between researchers at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and NCWCD, Riyadh.

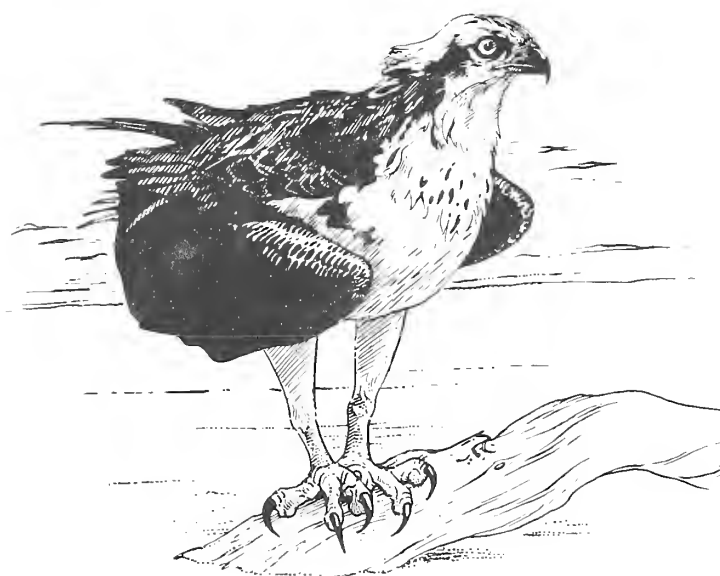


Fig 11. The Red Sea has possibly one of the densest populations of ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* in the world. A new study aims to shed more light on its breeding biology.

A study of the resident osprey on Farasan is planned to gather baseline data on their breeding biology and ecology. To date there has been little published data on the breeding biology of the osprey in the Red Sea, compared to the numerous studies on osprey populations in North America *P.h. carolensis* and northern Palearctic *P.h. haliaetus*, and in Australia *P.h. cristatus*. The NCWCD recognises the need for medium to long term monitoring studies, which may be used in conservation management within their system of established protected areas, maintaining both traditional lifestyles and wildlife diversity. Surveys by NCWCD and MMU suggest that there were between 40-60 breeding pairs in the archipelago in the 1993/4 season. A wider aerial survey of the osprey along the Saudi Red Sea coast was conducted by Philippe Gaucher,

National Centre for Wildlife Research, Taif, in late February 1994.

The onset of the osprey breeding season on Farasan extends over approximately two months, the early breeders laying eggs in late November, with incubation through December, and fledging in February. Late breeders may not lay eggs until late January, with young fledging in late April.

Future studies will involve support in the field by Dr Stephen Newton (NCWCD), and Dr Hany Tatwany (NCWCD). Peter Symens (NCWCD) has also contributed assistance and advice regarding the known 2-3 breeding osprey pairs on the Saudi Arabian coast and inshore islands of the Arabian Gulf.

The study will last a minimum of two field seasons and contribute to a postgraduate degree.

Any information relating to osprey breeding records in the Middle East region (latitude; longitude; date; number of nests; number of chicks; fledging dates) or any behavioural observations, would be gratefully received.

We would like to thank Prof. Abdulaziz Abuzinada (NCWCD General Secretary) and Dr Hany Tatwany for authorising and co-ordinating the research on Farasan, and to John Semple (The British Council, Riyadh) for developing links between research institutions, enabling further studies to continue.

Paul Fisher & Dr Chris Goldspink, The Manchester Metropolitan University, Department of Biological Sciences, John Dalton Building, Chester Street, Manchester, M1 5GD, UK.

Announcement: 1995 OSME AGM

The next Annual General Meeting of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East will take place on Saturday 15 July 1995. Details of venue will be announced in the Spring 1995 OSME Bulletin.

Credits

Word processing Lorraine Russell. Artwork; gull-billed tern, black bushchat, purple gallinule and Arabian waxbill by Dave Showler, European bee-eater by Mark Andrews; black francolin by Robert Gilmore and osprey by Kieth Brockie. Maps by MCJ and Carol Qirreh. Software and computer consultant Terry Rowell. Printed by Lakeshore Graphics, Nottingham UK.

Address

All correspondence for the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia and *Phoenix* should be sent to: Michael C Jennings, Co-ordinator ABBA, 1 Warners Farm, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire, PE17 3HW, UK. (Telephone 01487 841733; Fax 01487 843270).